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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S COMICS

interview

#5

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Pacific Comics

BOLD ADVENTURE #1

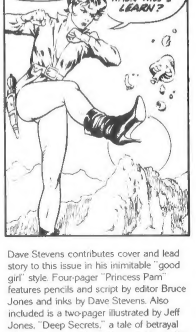
BOLD ADVENTURE #1 — Featuring "Time Force" by Bill Dubay and Rudy Nebres. Pacific Comics is pleased to present a new bi-monthly comic title focusing in on fast-paced adventure. This is a regular bi-monthly title, with each issue featuring no less than three pulse-pounding tales of action packed excitement. The lead feature in this premiere issue is "Time Force," created and written by longtime Warren writer/editor Bill DuBay and master comic illustrator Rudy Nebres.

It is a story of an intense struggle that is unlimited in scope and unbridled by the restrictions of time itself. That's not all though. Bold Adventure also brings us "Spitfire," an exciting series of World War II adventure by one of the industry's real legends—John Severin. Severin is an artist who elevates many scripts he illustrates, but writer DuBay has given him a real corker. This is most assuredly not your average combat-fare, but a yarn that will set new standards in a genre that has been less than dazzling over the past few years. We at Pacific heartily welcome DuBay, Nebres and Severin to our creative "family."

But that is not all. Bold Adventure #1 also contains a great story by an all new talent—Kent Williams. Originally scheduled for Captain Victory #12 (see "Pacific Premieres #1") we felt that this story would be best suited for our new adventure series. Written by Bruce Jones, this ten-pager, "Aye For An Eye" is a tempest tossed tale of old salts and sea monsters that will thrill you up to the final page. Bold Adventure, 32 pages, regular stock, and features a Rudy Nebres cover. — $1.00

ALIEN WORLDS #4

COVER BY DAVE STEVENS



Dave Stevens contributes cover and lead story to this issue in his inimitable "good girl" style. Four-pager "Princess Pam" features pencils and script by editor Bruce Jones and inks by Dave Stevens. Also included is a two-pager illustrated by Jeff Jones, "Deep Secrets," a tale of betrayal with a science fiction twist. And, appearing for the first time in color, a reprint of an Al Williamson—Frank Frazetta masterpiece first published in "Witzend #1" under the title, "Savage World." Eight pages with an exciting new script by Bruce Jones.

Ken Steacy also contributes six pages of dazzling art and color with "One Day In Ohio," a "human interest" story sans humans. Lastly, Aldolpho Buylla illustrates an eight-page story by Jones entitled "Plastic," 32 pages, "Baxter" stock.

— $1.50

SILVER STAR #5

Jack Kirby's "visual novel" of his projected next phase in human evolution continues its regular bi-monthly schedule. As Morgan Miller, first of a new breed of super humans, continues to discover and gather together more of "the next breed," we are treated to plenty of cosmic-scale action in the classic Kirby manner.

Jack Kirby is an American original—as his characters continue to redefine humankind, he continues to redefine and expand the parameters of the comic book experience.

There is also a new inker on this issue of Silver Star, none other than longtime Kirby associate D. Bruce Berry. His practiced hand embellishes Kirby's pencils as they should be—clean and crackling. Since Berry's back up feature and Silver Star #3 and #4 "bumped" Tim Burgard's five pager, "The Rescue," We are now running it in issue #5. Thirty-two pages, regular stock, Kirby cover. — $1.00

July Shipping

EDGE OF CHAOS #3

By Gray Morrow: This is it! The shattering conclusion of the three-issue mini-series. Journey with Eric Cleese, a modern day man who finds himself chased into the role of a hero in pre-deluge Atlantis. A war is raging there, where creatures of mythology and highly evolved sentients from the heavens form awesome battalions. We reach a frenzied pitch of action and a very surprising conclusion as Grey Morrow wraps up one of the most satisfying comic book experiences of the this or any other year. Here is a top talent who is really "cutting loose" for all he is worth, and it is a treat to be along for the ride. Thirty-two pages, regular stock, and Gray Morrow cover. — $1.00

ELRIC OF MELNIBONE #3

By Roy Thomas, P. Craig Russell, and Michael T. Gilbert. We listed this title last month for June shipping, but are re-scheduling for July due to the delay in shipping of Elric #1. Michael Moorcock's classic hero continues in this lush adaptation by three of the genre's finest talents. In this chapter Elric apparently drowns, but is saved by the water-god, Straasha. Elric's evil cousin, believing him dead, places himself on the throne, setting the stage for a deadly confrontation. In the finale, Elric comes face to face with the evil god, Arioch. This is a beautiful, lyrical rendering, printed on "Baxter" stock in full-process color. Thirty-two pages, July release. — $1.50

JOE KUBERT SCHOOL PRESENTS

Pacific Comics has true commitment to new talent in comic art. We honestly believe that the super-stars of tomorrow are out there right now. Joe Kubert does, also, and his outstanding school of comic art has been developing some of the finest artists around. This comic is a one-shot title, produced with the full cooperation of the Joe Kubert School. In addition to six fine stories by top students, we are served what has become an all too rare treat—new work by Kubert. Joe has provided the cover, based upon a story by Mike Chen and Ron Randall as well as a two-page interior comic story and introduction. These frame a fine and ecclectic selection of work by current students at the Kubert School. Many of these students seem destined for greatness in their chosen fields of comic art. The selection includes: "Crown Of Thorns," "Tate's Hell," "Things That Go Bump In The Night," "The Dragon," "Physical Barriers," "The Trophy," and "Criminal Operations." — $1.00

BERNI WRIGHTSON Master Of The Macabre — #3 —

Response to our first 2 offerings of Berni Wrightson material was very enthusiastic. By now you all have seen the beautiful printing on issue #1 —and Issue #3 is again colored by STEVE OLIFF and printed with full-color scanner separations on "Baxter" stock.

Two stories were originally done for Warren; Nightfall written by Bill DuBay and illustrated by Berni Wrightson, and A Martain Saga written by Nicola Cuti and illustrated by Berni Wrightson. Two more stories were originally presented in Badtime Stories; King Of The Mountain and The Last Hunters, both written and illustrated by Berni Wrightson.

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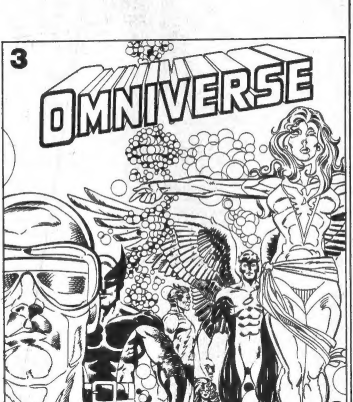

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UP FRONT

Many of you have been wondering if **Mark Gruenwald's** much heralded and eagerly-awaited third issue of OMNIVERSE is ever going to appear.

The answer is — *yes.*

As you no doubt know, Mark has been up to his ears making MARVEL UNIVERSE perhaps the most popular project of the year. Now, at long last, he's applied himself to completing OMNIVERSE with equal diligence and attention to detail, making #3 the most outstanding issue yet of this already much-acclaimed, fine fan magazine. There's more fascinating factual material for comics continuity buffs between these two covers than you can find in any *dozen* other fanzines combined! And, speaking of the covers, none other than Energetic **Ed Hannigan** — who designed and drew the incredible MARVEL UNIVERSE multi-cover mural — has combined talents with inker **John Beatty** to bring you a beautiful wraparound montage of mutants.

In short, OMNIVERSE #3 is well worth the wait.

By the time you read these words, OM #3 will be on the press. Allow a few weeks for printing, another couple for distribution, and you should be seeing copies of OMNIVERSE #3 popping up at your favorite comics shop (or in your mail box) in about sixty days or so.

And, in only 30 days, the next issue of COMICS INTERVIEW will be coming at you. I promise you a sneak peek at **Don McGregor's** smashing JAMES BOND 007 book — along with a price and full ordering information — in my next editorial.

See you soon!

-David

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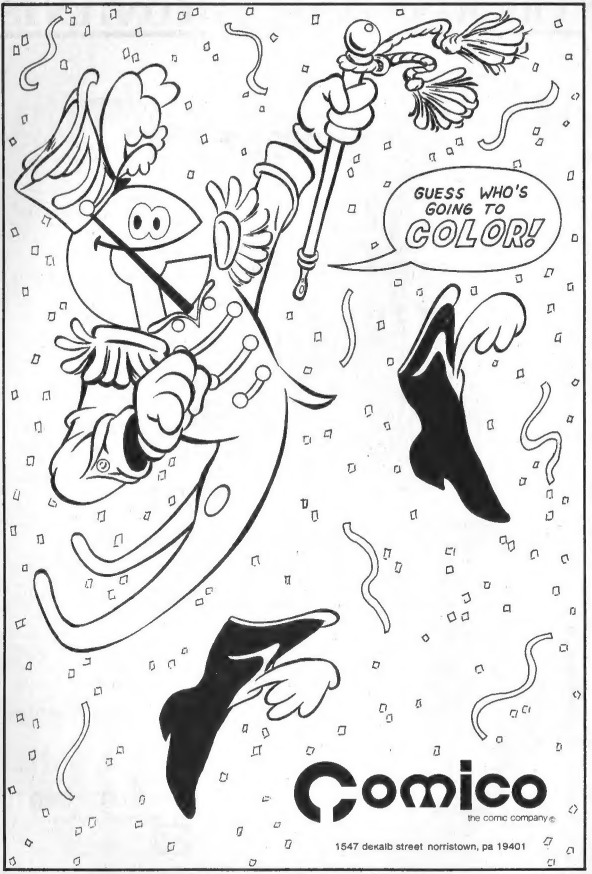
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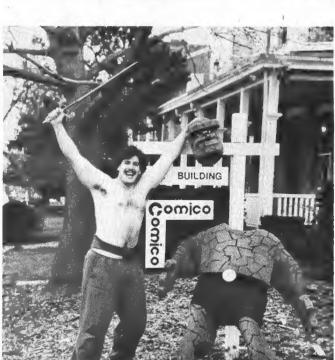
"The comic industry has to grow up!"



COMICO

Comico, the comic company, is among the newest amd most ambitious of the independent publishers springing up in the field. Comico's five titles — AZ, SKROG, SLAUGHTERMAN, GRENDEL and PRIMER — are distributed through the direct-sales system and so are available exclusively in comics shops or by subscription.

What is, perhaps, most surprising about such an enterprising endeavor is that all of the comics creators are (at least, for now) essentially unproven and unknown. Starting from scratch, on such a scale, is virtually unprecedented under the circumstances.

Hero-historian Lou Mougin first brought Comico to my full attention by eagerly exhorting me to read copies of AZ and SLAUGHTERMAN. There was a contagious enthusiasm about the books that transcended their shortcomings, and so I suggested an interview to the Comico crew. We met at a coffee shop in Manhattan, where the following conversation took place. Present were Phil Lasorda (writer/artist of AZ) and Gerry Giovinco (writer/artist of SLAUGHTERMAN), along with Bill Cucinotta and Bill Anderson (writer/artist & inker of SKROG)...

DAK: *What's interesting about Comico is that you don't give the impression of having analyzed the market and said, "Well, superhero groups are selling well, so let's do superhero groups." You really have taken a chance, with characters like Az — a fat pinhead wearing a raincoat...*

PHIL LASORDA: I designed him after my father.

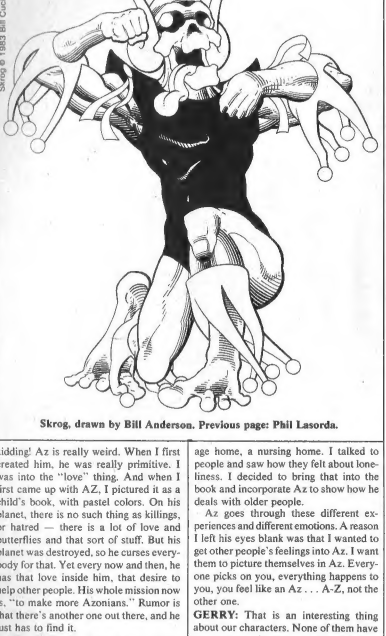
BILL (COOCH) CUCINOTTA: Wait 'til he reads that!

PHIL: I had a psychology teacher in college analyze AZ for me, and he said for women it is a penis gratification, and more women are going to like the character than men. He felt Az would have a certain tendency to sexually excite women.

GERRY GIOVINCO: Personally, Phil, AZ changed my life.

PHIL: I just have penis envy. Only

"People like the chances we are taking."



Skrog, drawn by Bill Anderson. Previous page: Phil Lasorda.

kidding! Az is really weird. When I first created him, he was really primitive. I was into the "love" thing. And when I first came up with AZ, I pictured it as a child's book, with pastel colors. On his planet, there is no such thing as killings, or hatred — there is a lot of love and butterflies and that sort of stuff. But his planet was destroyed, so he curses everybody for that. Yet every now and then, he has that love inside him, that desire to help other people. His whole mission now is, "to make more Azonians." Rumor is that there's another one out there, and he just has to find it.

DAK: *I thought that was a unique motivation, too. Not the old, "My parents were killed, so now I've got to stop crime!"*

PHIL: Well, see, he is only here for a little bit of time. He goes from planet to planet. He is going to be on an old-age planet, in the fifth issue. The cover is him in a wheelchair.

My brother is a physical therapist, and when I was in college, in order to earn extra money, I worked with him in an old-age home, a nursing home. I talked to people and saw how they felt about loneliness. I decided to bring that into the book and incorporate Az to show how he deals with older people.

Az goes through these different experiences and different emotions. A reason I left his eyes blank was that I wanted to get other people's feelings into Az. I want them to picture themselves in Az. Everyone picks on you, everything happens to you, you feel like an Az . . . A-Z, not the other one.

GERRY: That is an interesting thing about our characters. None of them have eyes except Skrog, and Skrog's eyes never focus. Too bad we didn't bring any early versions of Skrog. He used to have a knife sticking out the top of his head!

PHIL: Like you said about .us being different . . . **Dave Seroggy** of Pacific said, "You guys are so different, there is no way you could say no to a book as different as that." People like the chances we are taking with the books.

COOCH: The reason that we are different is that everything is totally personal.

GERRY: Every one of us has something to do with the character we are drawing. Every time I look at SKROG I die — because it is Cooch all over, every expression the character makes.

COOCH: Well, I do hibernate in trash cans.

GERRY: My character, Slaughterman, is the so-called "first transvestite superhero." Personally, I am not a transvestite —*(in a high-pitched voice)* really. But I try to put myself in all the different characters. With me it is sort of a challenge. SLAUGHTERMAN is more about social relationships, religions, religious ideals, things like that, and I try to incorporate my ideas about them into the strip, using the character. SLAUGHTERMAN is a little straight-jacketed by the comics format — all our characters really go beyond that. My character is unusual, because it is a woman in a man's suit of armor!

DAK: *You haven't said anything about GRENDEL.*

GERRY: That is because **Matt Wagner** is not here. Matt is sort of an interesting story, himself. We call Matt, "Mr. Different." His whole thing is trying to do something different. GRENDEL is not going to last forever. GRENDEL is really weird. Matt has a real nice surprise ending for it. He doesn't want to get locked into doing an endless series. GRENDEL is drawn in a Japanese style and he doesn't want people to think he can only draw that way, so he is going to do something else that is on the other side of the spectrum.

When Matt first started working for us, he was developing a story — I don't know exactly what the title was, it might have been ARTHUR PENDRAGON — all about King Arthur. And out came CAMELOT 3000.

PHIL: He was crushed by that.

GERRY: He knows the Arthurian legend inside and out. So when CAMELOT 3000 appeared, he said, "No way. I am not going to do it. I am just going to have to come out with something different."I was really pleased with the Arthurian story he was working on, and I said, "He is really going to have a hard time topping that." And out he comes with this guy in a black suit and a clown mask. I said, "Well, he is kind of neat. What is he?" "Oh," he said, "he is the villain. Here is the hero. His name is Argent." He'd gone back to BEOWULF, took the wolf, Argent, and made him the hero. Grendel is the villain. He's real handsome, and has an Oedipus complex that is a very weird thing. It is masterfully written. Matt is

"I designed AZ after my father."

twenty-one years old,and I think he is going to be the next **Frank Miller.**

PHIL: Matt is that type of person. He can really catch you with a story. When I first read GRENDEL I really got emotionally into it; I just couldn't wait for the second one.

Matt is very dramatic at staging his characters. He loves drawing capes, as an example. He makes a cape take a form with the character. A lot of people draw capes and just let them fall wherever. Matt's capes take a shape, and each one is sculpted to fit the character. He did a picture of Batman on a roof, looking down, and a little part of the cape goes over the ledge. Just a little tip, hanging there.

GERRY: But it is so dynamic.

PHIL: It is the best part of the whole picture. Batman looks so menacing . . . so evil. When I look at Matt's stuff I get emotional and upset. I say, "God, why can't I ever think of something like that." We are speaking very highly of Matt, because Matt is going to be very big. There is no way that he can't.

DAK: *What if one character becomes ultra-popular, or if a character is very unpopular?*

GERRY: That is a real big question. We are thinking in terms of flexibility. As mentioned, GRENDEL is not going to last forever. I know that Matt already has another character planned. I don't want SLAUGHTERMAN to last forever, either. My book is pretty well projected, though — it is going to be out there for a couple of years, if it is successful. And I think our characters are loose enough to last as long as we want and, if they are unsuccessful, hopefully we are creative enough to come back with something else.

DAK: *How did you guys get started?*

GERRY: I'm from Norristown, Phil is from Lafayette, and Cooch is from Philly. At Bishop Kenrick High School, I was doing a comic strip about the school mascot, called the Kenrick Knight. I was selling it for a nickle a shot, the first comic stuff I had ever done, and I was pretty bad. Phil and another fellow named Vince saw it and said, "This guy sucks! My God, we can do better than this crap!" So they started a strip called Captain Kenrick. And I would end up printing it, doing all the dirty work and everything. Those guys were ahead of me in high school, so they went off to different colleges. I stuck out another year, then went to the Philadelphia College of Art. Vince was free-lancing at the time, trying to get into Marvel and DC. He was doing crazy stuff and not getting much work. I had this

AZ © 1983 Phil Lasorda

AZ, from an unpublished drawing by Phil Lasorda.

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Photograph by Jane Arons

"Matt Wagner is the next Frank Miller."

article from FREE ENTERPRISE magazine that featured Captain Free Enterprise saying, "You, too, can start your own comic book." So when Vince was complaining, "I can't make it in comics, they won't let me do this, and I can't do that," I said, "Look we can publish your stuff. Captain Free Enterprise says we can do it.

I still keep that thing as a memento.

PHIL: We had all these ideas. We started the company with creative rights as its basis. We were artists first, businessmen second. That's what we still are. We believe in the artists and the writers first.

We had all these ideas — great aspirations of mass-marketing, four-color, Curtis Distribution, and all that, and we started looking into it, and our *naivete* opened a lot of doors. People said, "This is great. You guys are nineteen years old, you've got your future ahead of you, blah, blah, blah . . ." and we just took notes, even though we didn't have the money to do anything.

COOCH: I'd met Gerry in college and I'd help out at conventions and stuff. Eventually, Vince left, so they needed another persón. I came into Comico last year in May, but they've been at it since 1980

GERRY: Phil's brother, **Dennis Lasorda**, is a financial partner.

PHIL: Yeah. Dennis is the physical therapist. He bought into the company after discussing with us how far we wanted to go, where we could go with it, and after talking with different distributors. Dennis saw a lot of good things and said he wanted to get in on Comico. We were just out of college, and money was kind of tight. We needed financial backing, and Dennis was there to do it. So we got a place, a studio. We have this whole first floor in a suburban setting, with a little tree that squirrels live in

GERRY: There used to be a big joke with the distributors: "How're the dead squirrels out there in Norristown?"

PHIL: It's a lot different than, say, New York. It's a real quiet setting. It's a lot of fun.

DAK: *Do you guys do this full time?*

GERRY: Yeah, we're at Comico eighteen hours a day. Constantly. Me and Bill, we haven't slept all weekend. We were putting the finishing touches on SKROG. I was lettering it — I letter most of the stuff, except for maybe Phil's story.

DAK: *Putting out a whole line of books is a fulltime job.*

GERRY: You really have to put a lot into it, especially at the beginning. Our big problem right now is scheduling. Early on we developed this schedule that was ungodly 'cause we weren't really anticipating a lot of the problems that came up — like our roof caving in, in the middle of winter. The snow came inside the house! Right now, I think we've made our last late deadline. Hopefully, we are going to be on track from now on.

DAK: *Look at the bright side — Marvel and DC still have trouble with scheduling, and they've been in the business all these years!*

GERRY: There are so many companies we have to compete with, that scheduling is really important. If you can be true to your word and be out there, right when you say you will be, you are going to earn a lot more respect.

Cat Yronwode published a list in COMIC BUYER'S GUIDE of every company that has been late. It was a whole page long, and we were there. So we took three weeks out of our schedule and said, "Okay, we are going to push everything up a bit, and we are going to have our office policies working straight."

It is really hard, because we run the business *and* do the artwork. There are only two people who work for us — Matt, and **Bill Anderson**, who is inking SKROG. We are still sort of feeling it out, how to work with other people who aren't as intimately involved in the group.

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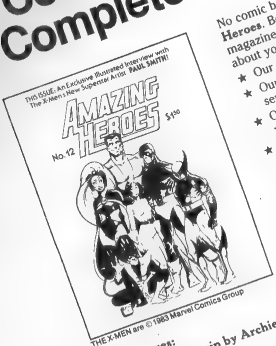
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"We are NOT about superheroes."

DAK: *Sounds a little like the early days of comics, when there were small studios with just a few people.*

GERRY: It is a lot of fun. We generate a lot of creative ideas, mostly because we are all pretty close. We just had a big jam-session on SKROG the other night, plotting six issues in advance. "Yeah, you could do this!" "Nah, Nah, that rots!" And so on, back and forth.

PHIL: We do have our differences. We argue all over the place. We have to — after being in the office eighteen hours a day, you get tired of each other's faces. It's Cabin Fever.

DAK: *When is Comico going to four colors?*

PHIL: With our fourth issues.

DAK: *So you've gone from the PRIMER, to four black-and-white books, to color. Was that part of a plan, or did it evolve?*

Gerry Giovinco

GERRY: It was an evolutionary thing, definitely. When we started out, there was going to be one book — called COMICO PRESENTS — which would have three stories in it, but that turned out pretty putrid. We decided that since nobody knew who we are, we would have to do something to say to people, "Yes, we can do all those things that entitle us to be called a real comic-book company." So we said, "Let's do a primer" — that is, us priming the comic-reading community. We sent it out to distributors, and sales were such that we felt we could probably keep it around as a regular title introducing new talent. We liked that idea, and it also gave us a buffer — buying us the time we needed to execute our own books.

PHIL: The next two books we had planned were SLAUGHTERMAN and TALE FEATHERS — we were into a big duck thing — which was also going to feature AZ and SKROG.

GERRY: But then we decided, "What the heck! If one book can make money for us, we could sell four books and make four times the money!" We had Dennis supporting us, so we could put four books out and make the money back. Which was the best thing we ever did, because PRIMER barely met costs, but when we put out SLAUGHTERMAN, SKROG, AZ and GRENDEL, sales of each were four times the sales of the PRIMER.

PHIL: It shocked us. It really did.

GERRY: The books paid for themselves, and then we made that much on top of it, so we were really very happy with them. We figure, if we are doing all right in black and white, we will do even better in color. Capital Comics' sales jumped considerably when they went from black-and-white to color. In the case of Americomics, sales jumped about 500% if what they're telling me is accurate — and according to them, we sold better than they did in black and white, so we should do great in color. We did a random pole of retailers, just called up all over the country and asked how Comico books were selling, and if they'd do better in color. They said, "You should sell very well." We asked, "What are the big things that helped us?" They said, "You advertise." We really promote our products. And we do advertise more than the other companies.

DAK: *I don't think a lot of beginning companies realize how important advertising is — how extremely important. What I also think is one of your strong points is an innocent sense of fun that reminds me of the feel of early Marvel — not stylistically, your styles are still crude — but your comics don't read like work, they read like you're having fun.*

Bill ("Cooch") Cucinotta

GERRY: At a convention we were told, "If you keep up this pace, you guys are going to be masters by the end of the year!" And we are trying to be! **Bill Anderson** came in and started inking SKROG and it helped our product a lot, because I wasn't very much of an inker. Cooch has a lot of great expressions that come across in his work, but he tends to be a somewhat simple artist and Bill brings out all the good things. SKROG has wonderful layouts, great ideas and everything — it just needed an embellisher who was right for it.

The books are all so completely different from one another. They all stand on their own and it creates a really neat attitude for Comico, I think, 'cause people aren't going to look at us and say — as they used to in our early days — "Those guys are just doing superhero stuff." We are *not* about superheroes! The way we had done the cover for PRIMER #1, it

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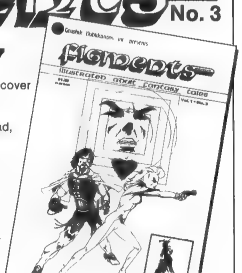
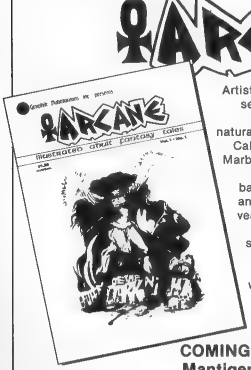


Gideon Starchild is featured in a 16-page cover story. Starchild attends the coronation and spurring of his cousin Gideon Goldmane. Goldmane is the oldest son of Gideon Godhead, the emperor. At the coronation banquet terrorists dressed as performing clowns take Gideon Godhead and representatives of nine ruling families hostage. Starchild, Goldmane and Teri-A-Shimer manage to escape.

Shadowmaster is penciled and inked by New Jerseyite Keith Royster. Brian Warren, a talented newcomer to the Professional Karate Association is severly beaten by Ninja assassins as his new bride is murdered. As the Shadowmaster, Warren avenges her murder dispatching the Ninja and Yakuza Lord responsible.

♀ARCANE No. 1



Artist Frank Turner brings Arcane to life in this his second appearance—the first in his own book. Scripter Cliff Van Meter pits Arcane's supernatural powers against the high priestess of Lillith. Called to New Orleans by an old friend, Dominic Marbleu, an Episcopal priest, Arcane investigates the activities of the Cult of Lillith. Between battling bouts with the high priestess, zombies and elder gods, Arcane's ancient origins are revealed through a mind link with Elizabeth Hunt, his nine year old ward, who along with her sister Charlotte, accompanied Arcane to New Orleans. The second issue will feature Arcane in a 16-page story with a backup by writer-penciler Stan Timmons entitled *Raven.* The first of three parts is scheduled for release September 19.

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"A lot of my covers are lies."

had come across looking that way. You know, a lot of my covers are lies. Everything on the cover has to do with the story — but its always illusory. And you have to read the story and go back and say, "So that's why that was on the cover!"

PHIL: I think that happens with a lot of our stuff. Grendel is never in a dynamic pose on the cover; he is always sitting there. Actually, after you read the story, you will find that —

GERRY: Don't say it! Matt doesn't like us to divulge his secrets! *(Laughter.)*

PHIL: You did that in THE COMIC BUYER'S GUIDE. Gerry sent a press release to tell them about the upcoming issues of SLAUGHTERMAN, SKROG, AZ and GRENDEL. The press release even revealed the surprise ending of SLAUGHTERMAN. I said, "Gerry, you shouldn't do that." He said, "Oh, they won't print that." *(Laughter.)* But we got a big response from California, when it came out that Slaughterman was a transvestite superhero, so that was neat. Actually, we never thought of our characters as superheroes. We always called them heroes, never superheroes.

GERRY: Besides, we'd get *this (slaps his own face)* from DC: "No, *we* have superheroes!"

PHIL: Comico has heroes. Az may be strong, but only outside his planet. He doesn't know he's strong; he thinks that he is just an ordinary Joe. He is not like the Hulk, trying to rip things down. He is just an average being from another planet. Slaughterman is not really a superhero, either.

DAK: *What struck me as unusual was killing the title character in the first issue of SLAUGHTERMAN.*

PHIL: People are often put off by the unusual quality of our books, but just as often that offbeat quality grabs 'em. A friend of ours, **Reggie Buyers**, a fan and an artist, told us this story: He was in Fat Jack's Comic Store in Philidelphia, and a kid comes in and picks up AZ #1. He says, "What is this crap? And he starts cutting it up — verbally, that is. He flips through it and says, "Who would buy this?" Then he keeps looking through it, all the way to the end — and buys it! It's funny, but it happens. I think if people pick up the books, read them, and find we have something special to say, we're going to catch them. I know it!

DAK: *Well, you may be doing the right thing at the right time, since there is currently such a boom in superheroes.*

GERRY: The big thing is that the comic industry has to grow up. As somebody said, "Where are the **Woody Allens** of comics?" Where are the really creative people out there who are trying to say something with this medium that is so facile and communicative?

DAK: *Well, even if I didn't like the books, I would still have to admire you, because the stuff you are putting out is so offbeat.*

PHIL: Well, comedian **David Brenner** says something like, "If, your whole life, you wanted to be a pretzel seller — and you went out and *were* a pretzel seller, even though you might bomb at it, at least you could say, 'Well, I tried it.'" We wanted to do it. I am happy to say that I actually put a comic book out, and I can tell myself, even if it fails, "I did it." But Comico is not going to fail. The way things are going for us now, I can't see us failing. I think we are a very different kind of company. Our stuff is completely different. Hopefully, people are going to pick up on that. I don't think our stories are too cerebral to eliminate half the market. There's something there for everybody. Some of the characters hold a particular fascination — like Grendel. People go right to it, because GRENDEL is so graphically stimulating.

It is fun, because we have this battle going on between us — when I see a new GRENDEL, I say, "I've got to beat it with AZ. I've got to work on my stuff to make it even better." The creative competition makes us become better artist and better writers.

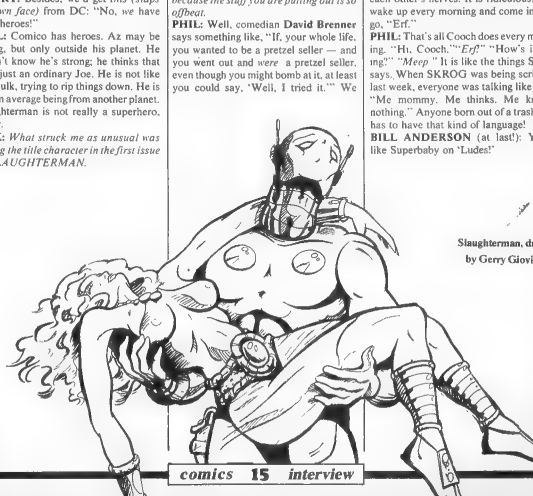
DAK: *So you guys are going to stick with it?*

ALL: Oh, yeah!

GERRY: If we can keep the peace in the house. I think Phil mentioned earlier we sometimes go stir crazy. We just get on each other's nerves. It is ridiculous. We wake up every morning and come in and go, "Erf."

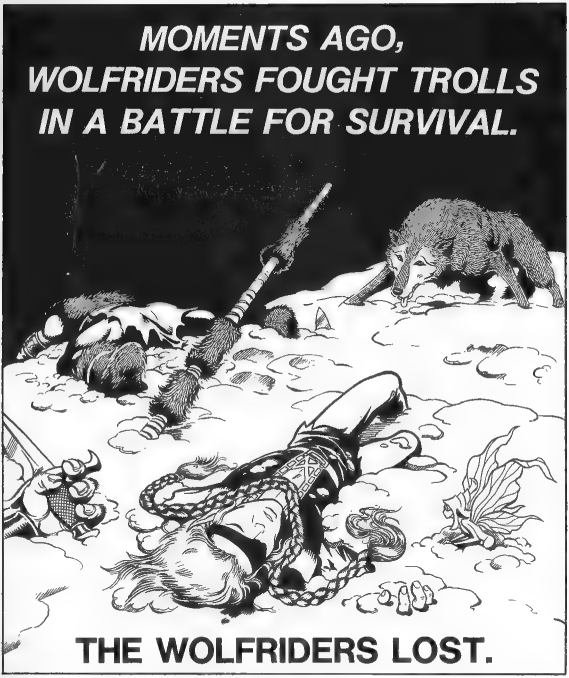
PHIL: That's all Cooch does every morning. "Hi, Cooch." "*Erf!*" "How's it going?" "*Meep.*" It is like the things Skrog says. When SKROG was being scripted last week, everyone was talking like him. "Me mommy. Me thinks. Me knows nothing." Anyone born out of a trash can has to have that kind of language!

BILL ANDERSON (at last!): Yeah, like Superbaby on 'Ludes!'



Slaughterman, drawn by Gerry Giovinco.

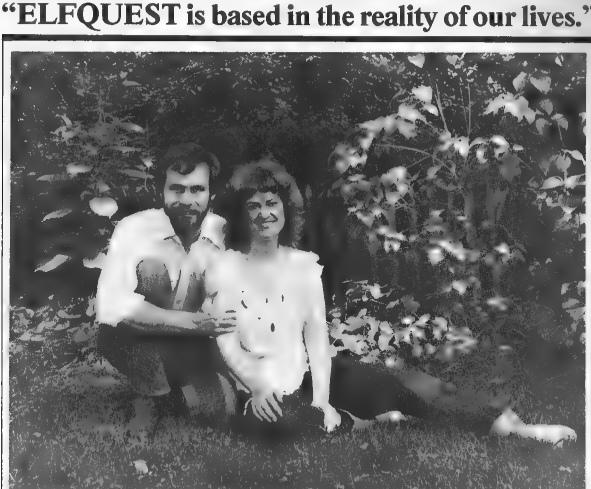
Slaughterman © 1983 Gerry Giovinco



Pick up the pieces in **ELFQUEST 16** - **"The Go-Backs"** - coming June 24 to your favorite comics shop!

Also in this issue - a special, pull-out preview of **A DISTANT SOIL** - a **different** science-fiction story by Colleen Doran and Richard Pini.

"ELFQUEST is based in the reality of our lives."



WENDY & RICHARD PINI

My path keeps crossing that of Wendy and Richard.

First time was in 1970, when I met Wendy: We were members of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society; we were both young artists impatient to leave our mark on the science fiction and fantasy fields. The next time our paths crossed was in 1974, when we were both young professionals illustrating for IF and GALAXY. The most recent crossing of paths occurred about a year ago, when I started working on D'ARC TANGENT with Phil Foglio. Presuming upon our long acquaintance, I went to them and found that they were absolutely unstinting in their aid, their support, their criticism, their information. Without them, it would have been impossible to pull D'ARC TANGENT together. That adds a certain personal debt to what was already a professional debt — of respect for two people who were doing something incredibly well and telling a story that I found really, really exciting.

So when I recently found myself in Poughkeepsie delivering camera-ready copy to the printer that does the covers for D'ARC TANGENT and ELFQUEST, I naturally called Richard and Wendy to say "hi!" and found them struggling with a problem. They had just taped an interview with Lou Mougin and David Kraft that turned out to have been in vain for technical reasons. Dave's and Lou's questions picked up quite clearly on the tape — but, alas, Wendy's and Richard's answers were inaudible. Since the first article I had done in the comics field was for DAK, when he was an editor at Marvel, I figured he wouldn't mind if I offered to help out. He said it was the perfect solution under the circumstances, to keep the interview fresh.

I was sitting in the Poughkeepsie train

"LORD OF THE RINGS is a story of Good and Evil.

station when Richard arrived. He found me sitting there next to a sign, which I had hastily lettered, that said, "Acme interview repair. You flub 'em, we dub 'em!" He gave me the tapes. On the way back to New York City, I pulled out the best of Lou's and Dave's questions and then did my best over the phone that evening, tossing in a few of my own . . .

FREFF: *Because you are a man and woman production team — a rarity in this field — I'm curious to know what percentage of your readers are male, and what percentage female. Any idea?*

RICHARD PINI: We can only tell by two things: One, from the letters we get; and two, from the people who come up to us at conventions, where we can see them. And it looks to be about 50/50. We heard that mainstream comics have a predominantly male readership, but we have been very proud to have about an even mix of male and female readers, of all ages.

WENDY PINI: The direct-sales shop owners that we have an opportunity to meet in various parts of the country often say that a large percentage of those who purchase ELFQUEST are young teenage girls. I don't know if they are remarking on this because it is still unusual to see a young teenage girl in a comics shop, or whether there are a disproportionately large number of girls coming in. But when we travel, I agree with Richard that it is about equal between sexes of all ages.

FREFF: *Why is that, given a comic-book market that has always been overwhelmingly male?*

WENDY: Recently, I asked Marvel's direct-sales manager, **Carol Kalish**, essentially the same question. I remarked on the fact that it seemed like more women are becoming interested in comics, not only as fans, but also on the creative end. She didn't think it was so much that women were becoming interested in things that were traditionally male, as that men are becoming more interested in things that typically interest females. For instance, THE X-MEN, which as far as I know is still Marvel's top-selling book, has a high degree of what you could call soap-opera in it, and has a high degree of both female and male readership.

RICHARD: Also, I would hazard a theory that in the larger companies — traditionally staffed by men — comics are put out almost by process of committee. While, here, we are two people doing it,

and we are 50% male and 50% female. *(All laugh.)*

FREFF: *I won't go into that. (More laughter.) I can see the NATIONAL INQUIRER headline now: "Two Hermaphrodites Producing a Comic Book in Poughkeepsie."*

WENDY: I think that women — especially younger women — have traditionally had a high degree of romance and adventure in them. That is a characteristic of ELFQUEST. I think they would naturally be attracted to it. I don't know how much the fact that I am a woman illustrating it has to do with the attraction that girls and women have for it.

FREFF: *That brings up a question, Wendy, as to whether other people perceive you — and, indeed, whether you perceive yourself — as a role-model?*

WENDY: I have heard that other people do perceive me as a role-model, but I don't want to set myself up as one. I like the fact that, as far as I know, I am the first woman to create and write and illustrate and publish and market. Of course, you know Richard's role in all of this — but I think that my role has to be acknowledged, too. *(Laughter.)*

FREFF: *We know what Richard's role is! (All laugh.)*

RICHARD: Well, somebody has got to do the damn dishes. I think we've perceived that there is a certain amount of looking up to both of us, in different respects, as role-models. But as Wendy says, she has essentially taken the idea of ELFQUEST and pushed it through. If I may be so bold, I would say that she is the driving force and I may be the shaping force. We both get feedback, so I know that people have been encouraged to try the same sorts of things because of ELFQUEST. Artists will come up to her — or to me, but I just tell them to go to Wendy . . .

WENDY: Malarkey, you do! *(Laughter.)*

RICHARD: We have our parts to play and, of course, the rest of the alternatives are also playing their part — especially for the last couple of years. But the fact that Wendy has done all of the creative things that she has, while I have done the business and managerial things that I have — and we are both individuals doing them and not a conglomerate — provides something of a role-model for people to try the same thing.

WENDY: I think kids sometimes cast us in a parental role. They come to us for advice. You know, the ones who want to get started from the bottom up and don't know anything about it. They want to know, how do you publish a comic, where do you find distributors, the basic things.

FREFF: *There is a perceived lack of villains in ELFQUEST — no villains, just antagonists.*

RICHARD: You mean the guy with the black hat and the unshaven face, the Snidely Whiplash, pure-evil villain? ELFQUEST has none of that because there are no absolutes, really, in the story of ELFQUEST. A lot of times we have been compared in one way or another to LORD OF THE RINGS. However, LORD OF THE RINGS is a story of Good and Evil, whereas ELFQUEST is a matter of knowledge *versus* ignorance.

WENDY: If Winnowill, who has been our nastiest character so far, is portrayed correctly in the animated film, she might become the Maleficent of the '80s.

FREFF: *She does awful, awful, awful things.*

WENDY: Only by implication, though. It is funny: She has never really hurt anyone to the point of actual physical harm; it was all by implication and innuendo and manipulation. And I suppose, in a sense, that made her infinitely more scary than a villainess as straightforward as Maleficent, who blasts you with a lightning bolt and makes thorns grow around your castle.

FREFF: *Torturing Strongbow is relatively nasty, I must say.*

ELFQUEST is a matter of knowledge *versus* ignorance."

WINNOWILL, STOP! YOU HAVE LOST! THE WOLFRIDERS HAVE FREED THEMSELVES! THEY ARE JUST BEHIND ME!
AAAYOOOO
HEAR THEM HOWL?
THEY WANT BLOOD!
THEY SHAN'T HAVE IT. SO LONG AS I HAVE HIM!
RATTLE
HISSS

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WENDY: She did cause him great pain, but she didn't cause him any physical injury. She could have, if she wanted. The thing about Winnowill is that she's evil, but not defined, clear-cut evil-evil. What she *does* is evil. And we have the privilege of watching her fall apart as the entire Blue Mountain sequence unfolds. It begins with her in a position of extremely high power — she knows everything, the Wolfriders know nothing — but gradually she begins to get shaken. Her lofty perch begins to rattle a bit, and finally, in the issue called "The Fall," she literally does fall. First, she loses her style and her *panache* to the point where she is bellowing, "Attack them, you fools!" like any common villain, and then in the end, after a gradual disintegration, she chooses to fall rather than be made into something other than what she is.

RICHARD: And in the following issue, #15, we come to realize the ironic ambiguity: That so much of the motivation for the evil she has done turns out to have been, in a sense, the right motivation. Execution was deplorable, but the motives are exceptionally debatable.

FREFF: *Now, for villainy, however, this King of the Trolls that seems to be coming back — the one who smashed the old, old trolls — he sounds pretty bad.*

RICHARD: He is pretty much without redeeming social value.

FREFF: *So there is someone who would qualify as a true villain?*

RICHARD: We didn't intend to have ELFQUEST totally ambiguous. On many issues, we have attempted to show the reader both sides of the coin, just to get the reader to think about the things we are saying. But every story needs an absolute stinker!

WENDY: I think that one of our less ambiguous characters is, for example, the Bone-Woman in issue #9. I don't know what kind of an impact that issue might have had. I think that it was so much in the middle of things that people don't think of it as a separate story, but it holds up nicely on its own as a nice sort of fable related to the ELFQUEST mythos.

RICHARD: And it is also very interesting in light of the charges of extreme violence, stemming from the events of #15. Almost no one in the thousands of letters — literally — that we've gotten on issue #15, seems to remember the violence that was in issue #9. A man's hand is sliced up, a man's thumb is cut off, people break bones, etc. And all "on stage" — nothing subtle about it.

WENDY: I think that is because everybody wanted the thief to die. That may, in

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"The elves eschew a lot of bullshit."

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Petalwing leads the Wolfriders in a charge. From ELFQUEST #14.

a sense, say something about the readers and about Richard and me. We all wanted him to get his, so we feel okay about it.

FREFF: *I have a question which you probably have been asked eighty thousand times, concerning that series of issues. Aren't the Nonna and Adar characters, at least partially, representative of you two?*

RICHARD: Why, Freff, whatever gave you that idea?

FREFF: *Well, I've known you a number of years. I'm referring to the rejection of Nonna from the tribe because she dared to be a symbol-maker — which bears at least some resemblance to social and professional rejections that Wendy has suffered in this field, before proving herself right.*

WENDY: I don't know about being proven *right,* exactly.

RICHARD: It is not just Nonna and Adar. So much of ELFQUEST is, to a greater or lesser extent autobiographical or reflective of the personalities that Wendy and I are.

FREFF: *That is inevitable with any creation, but this was such a specific field-to-field linkage.*

WENDY: We got a letter from **Christy Marx,** who asked specifically that question. She is another woman who has participated in comics as a writer. I found it interesting that the question came from her, because her experiences may have been similar. Certainly in issue #9 where the Bone-Woman says "This childless one dares to make symbols like a man," it was written with a great deal of identification, because I had taken flak — God knows the flak I had taken on so many different levels — for not only what I am doing, but the life-choices that I've made. You know, "Why don't you have children." — and so forth. So, naturally, it is a forum to present some of the problems that I've had to deal with.

The thing with Nonna was that she was a tad wimpy. Nonna expresses that part of myself that feels very inadequate, kind of shy and afraid, but at the same time will just keep plugging away, because she had this belief in the elves, even though she was afraid of them and a little bit awed by them. She had this firm faith in them. I think that I was expressing some of the feeling that I had at the time that I was a bit frightened by it all — not only the stuff that was happening in our personal lives, but the incredible growth in ELFQUEST, wondering if I could meet my deadlines and do all the stuff that was expected of me. When I was working on #9, we were also working on the novel and the first color volume at the same time.

FREFF: *Pretty overwhelming.*

WENDY: Yeah. Definitely.

FREFF: *How do you perceive the differences between human nature and elf nature? How have you tried to portray those differences? And can elf nature change?*

RICHARD: Have you got a couple of hours?

FREFF: *You mean you don't have index cards in front of you with all of these answers?*

WENDY: Richard just looked at me with his eyes kind of bugged out.

FREFF: *He is regretting having me volunteer to do this, isn't he?*

WENDY: No. This is great — because these are questions that no one has ever asked before. I think that, naturally, being very human ourselves, the elves are very easy to identify with as having human traits, human emotions, human characteristics. What they seem to do, that is different from the society in which we, the creators, live is — excuse the language — eschew a lot of bullshit. They don't do a lot of verbalizing of their feelings; what they do is called "the now of wolf-thought," which we described in the novel. In other words, take things one second at a time, and deal with them. If someone hurts somebody else's feelings there isn't any kind of grudge-bearing, it is just dealt with at that moment, without a lot of whining. They don't fool around with a lot of emotional garbage.

RICHARD: You see, they can communicate on a much more intimate, direct level than we can, through the form of telepathy they possess called "sending." It reminds me of a line from the movie THE WOLFEN, wherein the old Indian is talking about the creatures that are called the Wolfen and he says that in their world there can be no lies. And at least in the world of the Wolfriders, there are no lies. Things are dealt with as they happen, and there is no attempt at trying to sidestep, or lay blame where there is none.

WENDY: This is what we are trying to reflect in the conflict between Cutter and Leetah, when he says, "You know the truth, why do you try to deny it?" She says, "Truth. What truth?" She is playing a game, obviously. And he says, "In our tribe, we don't play games with our hearts. We know." And it is not very often that you come up against a human, or group of

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humans, particularly in American society, who act like that, without manipulation, without an ulterior motive. That kind of innocence is rarely to be found even in children, anymore.

FREFF: *And yet elf-nature for the Wolfriders is not necessarily the elf-nature of the original High Ones or the various tribes that you have examined in detail: Sun Villagers, the Gliders and now the Go-Backs . . .*

RICHARD: The Wolfriders had shed most of whatever "civilized" behavior the original High Ones may have had. They haven't examined in great depth the original High Ones. We've seen facets of what the High Ones might have been, reflected in the various tribes: the Wolf-riders, the Sun Villagers, the Gliders and now the Go-Backs. The tribes are all pieces of a puzzle, facets to an Over-Personality, if you will. The Wolf-Riders just happen to be representative of the most basic, natural, honest, living-in-the-present part of that Over-Personality.

FREFF: *What you just said cues in to the tribal questions that have been asked — things of an anthropological tone. I recall one review of ELFQUEST which savaged Wendy for "her lack of understanding of anything anthropological." That is not an exact quote, but I don't do a disservice to whomever it was — I could really insult them, by quoting then exactly. (All laugh.) And yet what you have here is a fascinating set of tribal structures. I am wondering what background you brought to this, and what research you may have done since you started it, to try to make it solid.*

RICHARD: Do you remember those one-page features they used to have in DC Comics . . . ?

FREFF: *I am asking a lot of those type questions, aren't I? (Laughter.)*

WENDY: Frankly, I am a little bit embarrassed to admit this, but I am sort of like **Al Capp**, who once described himself as a man with opinions on everything, but an expert on nothing. I really have not done what you could consider "hard" research into tribal societies, be they American Indians, be they Druidic, be they African, or be they Asian tribal societies. I really have a very catch-as-catch-can knowledge of different types of customs and mores and so forth, but having retained all of these different things in my memory, and having more-or-less correlated them, and having found simil-

The Wolfriders mourn their dead. From ELFQUEST #16.

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"There is a lack of manners amongst some fans."

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iarites between many tribal structures throughout the world, I have infused the different tribes of ELFQUEST with different aspects of all that I have absorbed over the years.

RICHARD: Neither of us are experts in any one thing, as Wendy has pointed out, but we do have access in either our memories or in our libraries to a lot of information. And, in addition to that, I think it is very important to state that we are both very painstaking when we are constructing each chapter, each issue, to be careful as possible in maintaining consistency, so that each new chapter fits in with everything that happened before and everything that we want to have happen in the future, and is also consistent internally. For example, we see to it that a particular weapon works and fits in with a particular character and the particular tribe that is using that weapon. It may not be a weapon found in any earthly culture, but it will work within the culture that we have defined.

WENDY: I don't think the tribal societies that we have created in ELFQUEST bear any comparisons to factual tribal society — for instance, the American Indians (there are so many tribes within that group that it is impossible to research them all). But ELFQUEST feels tribal without neccessarily reflecting any particular tribal culture.

RICHARD: This is a problem with a lot of the people who make the anthropological criticism: They criticize based on the observation that we are not following certain rules that are hard and fast for cultures on this world. But the culture that we are portraying is not of this world.

FREEFF: *And not of this species.*

WENDY: But meant to reflect the species.

RICHARD: And so the criticism almost becomes invalid, because of that.

WENDY: Let me play devil's advocate here. There are those who would say that was a cop-out. "Sure, it's your fantasy, so you can make up the rules as you go; but fantasy has to have integrity. You can't just pull one element from here and one from there and expect it to work."

RICHARD: And the answer to that is, of course: We certainly can, as long as all of the elements are integrated, *within our fantasy.*

FREFF: *I would actually toss in my two cents about the anthropological question, and say that in physics, I could show somebody that they were wrong if they said you could drop a rubber ball and it would fall up — but in anthropology, I defy anyone to come up with hard-and-fast rules.*

RICHARD: That is exactly it.

FREFF: *In any case, that aside, how do you two work together as writers? Does one of you do the verbs and one of you do the nouns?*

RICHARD: No. I take "A" through "L" and Wendy takes "M" through "Z," and I get all the punctuation that has round things on it and Wendy gets all the spikey punctuation.

WENDY: That is one of the answers he has index cards for!

FREFF: *So ELFQUEST is actually a massive Scrabble game. (Laughter.)*

RICHARD: You can't print that. You will let the secret out. It is not really, "how we work together as writers, " because I think that is too restrictive, but "how do we work together as creators of ELFQUEST," which might be a more meaningful question.

WENDY: Things have changed slightly over the years. When we began, I initially told Richard my idea, and then we had a big story conference before any words were put on paper, just kind of solidifying this world and this story, so that when we began ELFQUEST we knew exactly what would be the beginning, the middle, and the end. We knew this back in 1977. And what happens now is that we will have a story conference. I will tell Richard my plot ideas for a specific issue, and then we will have a story conference, and then we will iron out all the fine details. Then I sit down and write a script, and Richard edits the script, and then it comes back to me and I draw the issue. Whenever I bump up against a change that needs to be made — for example, in the dialogue, because the artwork may say something that doesn't need to be said in dialogue — I will consult with Richard again, just to be sure that we all know what is what and no changes are made by surprise. And that is how it gets done, essentially.

FREFF: *Do you ever find that your artwork brings you surprises in your text, creates things that need to be explained? Do you discover things as you draw them?*

RICHARD: I think it is much more the case that we will start off with too much in the way of script, and the artwork will remove words rather than add words. There are occasions that things have to be switched around sometimes for the most technical of reasons: For instance, a balloon needs to be in a certain place rather than another place, and it can be only half the size that we originally thought, so speech gets pared down and words get moved around, and so on. But usually the artwork is so expressive it will allow us to take words out, rather than put them in.

WENDY: I find that I am conscious of more than I ever was in our early years — the internal logic of each individual book, how it holds up against the logic of the previous books . . . say, in this case, fifteen issues. For instance, we caught some things in issue #16 that were not consistent with certain things that we had

"A girl who killed herself wanted to set

established before and so, although the dialogue was already lettered in ink, I brought this up to Richard, and we hashed it out, and then I went back and laid in entirely different dialogue, because it better reflected what was actually going on. Since the fans, themselves, are such excellent detectives and have been able to point out whatever inconsistencies there have been, we feel they are going to be watching even more closely as we draw to the close of the series. And we are watching ourselves that much more closely, to make sure that everything ties up exactly as it should.

RICHARD: Winnowill crept into our lives and had her effect. The entire Blue Mountain sequence was only going to be a single issue in length. Once we got there, we were able to determine that the characters and the situation and the philosophy and the psychology were so interesting, and so involved, and so needful of more exposition, that we made the singular choice to expand the ELFQUEST series to twenty issues. Now that we are out of Blue Mountain, the plots that we have for issue #16 through #20 are relatively simpler and are going to fit into those five issues. The story will not run away and we will not have to make another eleventh hour decision to go to twenty-five issues, or anything like that.

WENDY: I remember saying to you before, Freff, that I felt the Blue Mountain sequence must have really been agony to the fans in a way — because they had to wait four months between issues. Really, the whole incident in Blue Mountain takes place over three or four days, and waiting four months for each issue made the sequence seem to go on forever. We began to receive some complaints that the story was going downhill, and had to stick to our guns. When the Blue Mountain sequence becomes our third color volume of ELFQUEST and can be read all in one shot, it will be much easier to take and much more exciting as a story.

RICHARD: All the complaints we received were from readers who were with us from the start of the sequence and had to wait four months in between issues. The people who came in on issue #14, at the very end of it, and read the whole series all at one sitting, thought it was just fine. But they hadn't spent a year of their lives getting there.

Pencil sketch of Ekuar, for ELFQUEST #16.

Finished art.

FREFF: *Yes. It is the only drawback with your production schedule.*

RICHARD: All the best comics come out three times a year, Freff. *(All laugh.)*

FREFF: *I'll take that as a compliment. Or, at least, as an inspiration for D'ARC TANGENT.*

WENDY: After that, you should ask us a really mean question, to show that we can't butter up the interviewer.

FREFF: *Well, actually, there is a somewhat mean question staring me right in the face. Is there a dark side to having fans? I have heard all kinds of stories about people arriving at wee hours of the morning, calling at funny times . . .*

RICHARD: There are fans and there are fans. But 99.99% of them are great.

WENDY: Oh, you're generous.

RICHARD: Most of the letters we get are intelligent, entertaining, serious, sensitive, whimsical or whatever. Most of the people that we meet at conventions are nice to talk to; they are friendly and polite. But every group has its fringe, and within that ELFQUEST fan fringe are some who forget that there is a three-hour time difference between California and here. They call up at eleven o'clock — *their* time! — to save money, and so at two in the morning over here the phone rings. Or they forget the simple social courtesy of giving a phone call before dropping over and catching somebody just coming out of the shower.

WENDY: This has increased proportionately with the number of conventions that we have attended, and with the growth of ELFQUEST. Since last year, since the novel came out, our readership has again grown considerably, because we are gaining readers that never heard of ELFQUEST 'til they read the novel or the color volumes. As a reader, different input is coming from an entirely different group of people, and they tend to be quite critical, quite demanding of perfection, not only in our product but in our personal appearance and conduct. They will nitpick. For example, I have experienced a lot of remarks about my physical appearance.

FREFF: *You're kidding! I mean, you're not kidding!*

WENDY: It seems that nobody can take a photograph of me that looks like me. I could have had **Bette Davis** eyes — but instead I inherited the nose, for some reason. I do not have classic features, so sometimes an improper camera angle will be very unflattering. I find that fans are, without even thinking, very quick to say, "I thought your hair was red. I thought

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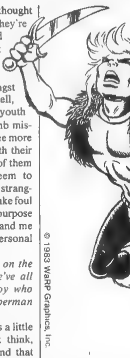
her soul free so she could be an elf."

your hair was thicker and fuller. I thought you were taller."In other words, they're coming up to a total stranger and making personal comments, and it took me a while to just take that sort of thing in stride. There is certain lack of manners amongst fans that I think is purely — well, maybe not purely—an aspect of youth But a lot of older ones make dumb mistakes, too. I think I would like to see more good manners among fans, in both their letters and their behavior Some of them write letters and don't even seem to consider that they are writing total strangers. They use foul language and make foul remarks, and I really don't see the purpose of this, other than using Richard and me as targets for some sort of personal catharsis.



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FREFF: *That certainly touches on the dark side of being popular. We've all heard stories about the little boy who jumped off the roof wearing a Superman cape.*

RICHARD: Yeah. Which strikes a little closer to home than you might think, because we know almost firsthand that ELFQUEST has had a similar effect on certain people. We get a small but recognizable fraction of letters and comments from people who say, in essence, "Thank you for writing a story about these wonderful elves. I am glad that you are showing humans as bad. I never wanted to be a human, anyway. Now I can be an elf, because I have ELFQUEST to guide me — and I'd much rather be an elf than a human." In fact, we received a letter from a woman who enclosed a copy of a suicide note that a friend of hers had written, and one phrase stands out in our minds: This girl who killed herself wanted to set her soul free so that she could be an elf, and live forever in Sorrow's End.

This was before issue #15 came out, so there was no connection between the events of #15 and the suicide. But obviously she was very, very heavily into ELFQUEST. Essentially, she took on the role of the kid who put on the cape and jumped.

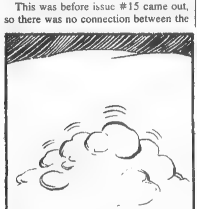
FREFF: *That must have disturbed you tremendously.*

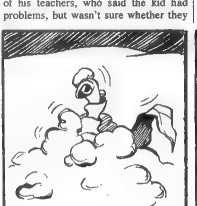
WENDY: The effect it had on us is that now, any time a really crazy letter comes in from a kid who really seems disturbed, we feel a sense of personal involvement. For example, we recently got a letter from a boy who said that he was being beaten regularly by his father, who had threatened to kill him. The boy mentioned a school that he was attending and I tracked him down through that school. I talked to one of his teachers, who said the kid had problems, but wasn't sure whether they were being dramatized in a letter just to make an impression or what. But he did say he would watch the kid, ask him questions and so forth. So I guess Richard and I feel we can't avert nuclear war, but at least if somebody is in trouble, we can check it out and do what we can.

RICHARD: The thing that is most disturbing about the ones who say they want to escape from this world, or who want to be elves instead of humans, is that they are overlooking entirely the fact that ELFQUEST, its characters and its world, are based very firmly in the reality of our lives. And of this world. Any fantasy worth its salt has a basis in the reality lived by the creators of that fantasy. Treating it as something totally separate from our world is absolutely 180 degrees out of phase with what ELFQUEST is meant to be.

WENDY: Yeah, I've told kids who seem to be out of control that anything they love about ELFQUEST can be found in *this* world — meaning Earth, here and now. ELFQUEST is just a symbol, maybe a parable, an allegory — I really don't know — but it has a basis in our everyday experiences. And the kind of love and brotherhood and sympathy we portray in ELFQUEST does exist in real life and can be found. But you have to give love to get love. You just can't sit back and whine and moan and cry that you are not getting it, and expect it to come to you. You have to give. I think this is a leap that people are afraid to make. They cry because they are not getting love and compassion, and it is because they are not giving it.

NEXT ISSUE: *Outside pressure on ELFQUEST . . . the loss of innocence . . . "independents" versus "genuine alternatives" . . . the blood of ten chiefs . . . ELFQUEST: The Movie . . . elfbargers!*





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"In the past, inkers were people who didn't

know how to draw. Today that is not true."

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DICK GIORDANO

Dick Giordano, DC Comics new Vice President-Managing Editor, carries the reputation of being one of the most innovative editors and expert inkers in the industry. He has proven his talents at Charlton, DC and Marvel over the years, and now faces the challenge of energizing DC for the Eighties. But before Dick ever claimed the editor's chair, he was an artist first. In this second half of our Giordano interview, conducted by DAREDEVIL artist Klaus Janson and Marvel editor Jim Salicrup, Dick explains his philosophies of inking, work, and life . . .

KLAUS JANSON: *With all your activities as Vice President and Executive Editor of DC Comics, have you put your career as an artist on the back burner?*

DICK GIORDANO: I am doing as much artwork as I did before and I'm damned if I know how. If I had to think about it, I know I wouldn't be able to do it.

KLAUS: *But you can't be devoting as much time to it . . .*

DICK: No, you're right. As a matter of fact, most of what I am doing as an artist right now is based on skill rather than emotional involvement. I an trying not to put myself in a position that requires a short deadline. And a heavy long-range commitment of my total skill. For example, take the GREEN ARROW thing that I am doing with **Trevor Von Eedon.** It's a labor of love for me. I enjoy doing it. But I know I only have to do four issues. So I know that I don't mind losing sleep for that period of time. If it were a regular book, I never would have taken it on, because I know I would not have been able to do more than four issues. Even at that it won't be the best I can do, it will be eighty or ninety percent of what I can do on that book. There isn't anyway that I can do one hundred percent because I

"At Charlton, I got in an argument with

don't have the continuity of time on a job, just those two weekend days. I get up on a Saturday morning, put my bathrobe on, sit at a drawing board, Monday morning, I get dressed and come to work. I never got out of my pajamas and bathrobe for the entire weekend, I never moved from my drawing board from breakfast to lunch to dinner. Occasionally my wife will insist that I go see a film, and then I go and fall asleep while she watches it, and then I go back to work.

JIM SALICRUP: *On your artwork, do you always work with assistants?*

DICK: Yes, always.

JIM: *What do they do?*

DICK: All of the work, and I get all of the credit. (Laughter.) Mostly backgrounds. It is very rare that an assistant does anything but backgrounds for me, and filling in black areas. It's really worth the effort to have somebody to do that.

JIM: *It's handy just to have somebody erase the pages.*

DICK: Absolutely. That's a big help too. I've been lucky in that I've had somebody here for a couple of years do that so I don't think about erasing pages. Of course "all the backgrounds," may not mean literally *all* of the backgrounds," unless I have a very skillfull assistant on a job. If there is something important to the storyline in the background, then I might want to do it myself. I think that you might remember that I have always said that I don't consider an airplane or acar, if it's the only thing in the scene, as background. That's *the* figure for the scene and I try to do those for myself. Especially if it has an impact on the story. If it is just a decoration, I'll try to let my background man do it.

JIM: *A lot of the top inkers today, are people who used to be your assistants.*

DICK: Terry Austin, Bob Layton, Klaus, Joe Rubenstein, and many of the inkers who are in the business today did a few jobs for me.

JIM: *A lot of the people who were your assistants have told me how much they learned from you. Exactly how do you work with them?*

DICK: I leave them alone pretty much. They learn by themselves.

JIM: *Klaus is shaking his head . . .*

DICK: He doesn't realize the truth of what I said. Now, Klaus, did I ever tell you anything — ? Did I ever tell you anything?

KLAUS: *One time you said, "This trestle you inked is not good." The reason I shook my head is because if you look at some of the people — Terry Austin's work, for instance — the style is completely different from yours — on the surface. The line-weights, and the fact that he is using a rapidograph, accounts for a lot of the differences between your style and his. The thinking behind it is very similar to that middle period when you were using pen, over a lot of Neal's stuff, or on John Buscema's CONAN. Then there was the CONAN that you pencilled or the Stephanie Starr material, when you were in that pen period. I was very much influenced by the same thing, which is why I think I can see it in Terry's work. So the thinking behind it stems from that certain school, the Dick Giordano school, and it's fascinating to see the thinking expand. Bob Layton is influenced by the same kind of thinking, Bob Wiacek is to some extent, also.*

DICK: What I think we're talking about is semantics. My philosophy of inking is that the work is done in your head before you sit down to a drawing board. The actual planning of what you are going to do, is more important than the actual doing of it, which is monkey work. If you've got a brush in your hand and you do this for ten years, you get better at it. But that isn't inking. Inking is the thinking in your head.

I approach each job as an inker with the same enthusiasm because its always a new one for me. I think I can

The "Animals" see themselves as superheroes.

the engraver. He threw some acid at me."

make a very real, valuable contribution to the best penciler in the world. I may be deluding myself, but I need to delude myself to get down to the drawing board and not feel as though I an a cog.One of the reasons I always had trouble inking **Neal Adams** was because his stuff was so fully realized it was hard for me to convince myself that I was making a contribution, even though I did so for so many years. God, Neal, leave something there for *me* to do! But Neal felt that I made a contribution and other people did.

KLAUS: *I think that fifteen years ago the idea of a good ink job would be to improve the pencils, but not necessarily take away from the character of the penciler. And today, my impression, speaking both to editorial people both here and at Marvel is that a good ink job is when you overpower the pencils.*

DICK: Gee, I hope that I didn't leave that impression whit you because that is not what I meant to do.

KLAUS: *Well, I do agree that the job of a good inker is leaving the character of the penciler.*

DICK: Your improvement and input into a job should be that only you and the penciler should know that it happened. If anybody else knows that there were some things different, then you've made a mistake in some form or another. You should be true to the pencils to the degree that, not only is anything that is in the pencils still there but so that the penciler feels that no matter how bad the pencils may have appeared, he made a valid contribution to it.

I think that what has happened now is that the inker has come to be looked upon as an artist rather than as a service. So now we have two artists working on one book. Artist #1 has the responsibility to lay-out, design and story-telling values. Artist #2 has responsibility to focus attention, in one area or another, through blacks or in color. Both artists serve different functions but that they are both artists, rather than they are a penciler and an inker like, in the past, when "inker" implied that you didn't know too much. Inkers were people who didn't know how to draw well enough so they turned to inking. And today that is not true at all.

JIM: *Let me just follow that up. I found at Marvel that they began thinking of the inker's role almost as the person who gives the book its identity. In other words, if the penciler would leave, say, DAREDEVIL, they would think, "Oh Klaus has been giving it a certain look; if we could maintain Klaus, over the years, it will retain the look."*

DICK: I think that's a philosophy that goes over to here too. There is a very simple explination for it. Everything that has gone before that has gone totally, forever. And all that is left is the inkline. Therefore, what is left is what establishes the character, or the characteristics of a particular book, no matter who penciled it. So it is safe to say that the inker is the one who will make that critical difference.

JIM: *What I found, as an editor who wasn't also an inker, was a lot of artists coming to me and telling me that they had to ink their own pencils because they were afraid of the inkers overpowering their work.*

DICK: A clear problem and I understand it fully. And I think that one problem is more responsible for my thinking than anyone other thing.

KLAUS: *Have you finished, saying what you wanted to say as an artist, especially by taking on this job as an editor? Your art has to come second to that.*

DICK: Maybe I'm doing a little less work but not that much less. I have been considering recently, that I better slow down and consider doing a little less work, as an artist and so far I haven't been able to because I'm another hand. And I need another hand. one issue of CAMELOT that **Bruce Patterson** was supposed to ink, he had turned in the last eight pages

From Chris Miller's novelization of NATIONAL LAMPOON'S ANIMAL HOUSE.

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"Inking is the thinking in your head."

on a Friday afternoon. I turned them in complete on a Monday morning. That means that I was committed to eight pages of really heavy inking in two days on a job that I had no familiarity with at all. The pages weren't in sequence. I had to take the rest of the book and read it and try to match without destroying myself and I did that because I was the only inker that was available for that weekend. It wasn't a question of me doing it better than anybody else — there was nobody else. And many of my assignments are on that basis: we go through all of the possibilities, and I take on a job that I really have no right taking on, in terms of the time that I can put into it, because as the managing editor I am left with no choice. No one else is available. I have to take a little more time in the future to do what I am doing. And I feel that if I am going to make another statement it is because I'm taking more time. I am not going to make a statement the way I'm working now under the gun, where there is really severe deadline pressure.

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DC's Wonder Woman, as drawn by Giordano.

JIM: *Which do you prefer, penciling or inking?*

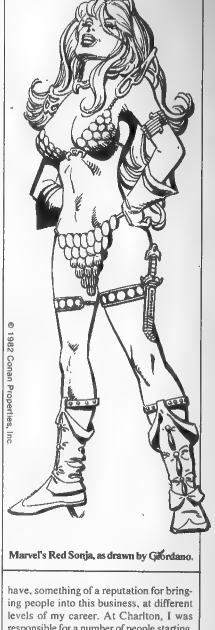
DICK: I don't prefer one over the other, but I do need to recharge my battery by doing a penciling job once in awhile. It leads you to new insights as an inker. That is why I take on new chores every three or four years. Somebody mentioned that sometime back and I thought of charting it. I don't think that I am best at anything in this business. But I do think that I am the only one who has done everything in this business. I can't think of anyone who has had as many opportunities as I have had to get into various aspects of the business. At Charlton I was involved with distribution, printing, and engraving, intimately involved with the details of all of these things. I was in the engraving department every day. When I got in an argument with one of the engraver, he threw some acid at me. Even though I am not intimately aware of everything, I know a little bit about the function that everyone has here. I need to change my situation regularly in order to keep my feelings about the business fresh. Or else you tend to sit home and say, "Hey I'm a good inker! What do I need all of that crap for?" And just do that one thing, until you become bad and everyone knows it but you. 'Cause you're sitting there thinking you've got it all now. You're the king of the hill! The only way to avoid becoming a has-been is to either shoot yourself at an early age, or change your situation so that you get a fresh outlook on everything.

KLAUS: *That is one of the things that I learned very early from you. You just cannot afford to stagnate.*

DICK: People don't always think of it as often as they should, but you can't sit still. You're either getting better or you are getting worse. If you don't practise your craft and approach it intelligently, you are going to start getting worse. All right, so sometimes you can't devote all the time you want to. But if I've only got four hours, I use the bloody four hours. I don't sell them short and go read a book and turn them into three hours or less. I do the best that I can in that four hours. I make the commitment and I've got the discipline to sit there and do it.

JIM: *You have been involved with trying to find new people for DC. Can you tell us about that?*

DICK: Yeah, that's a program that is much maligned. (Laughter.) Probably rightfully so but, it is a program that hasn't been attempted before. And very frankly, we don't know what we are doing. That's the editorial "we" here. I have, something of a reputation for bringing people into this business, at different levels of my career. At Charlton, I was responsible for a number of people starting, and here that seems to be the case also. And my assessment of DC, and the industry as a whole, was that it was dangerously short of talent over the next ten years. I still worry about that. And I started to think about ways we could prevent the shortfall or eliminate it all together. Because I could see an uncomfortable and no-win competition between a couple of publishers for the small group of available talent, so small that it wouldn't suit the needs of everyone. So my feeling was that we should take some



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Marvel's Red Sonja, as drawn by Giordano.

Dog Boy

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"I always had trouble inking Neal Adams."

active steps immediately to increase the size of the talent pool. And I was, quite frankly, aware of the real dangers of my taking all this initiative and of those people wandering over to Marvel and getting jobs and that has indeed happened in some cases. But it didn't matter to me then nor does it now. The fact is that it is an industry-wide problem and not one that is restricted to DC alone. Frankly, if Marvel gets five of my guys this week, I'll get five of their guys the week after. If the pool is expanded it is going to balance out. So I've embarked upon a plan, in a very small way. I had a workshop going in the building. Once a week, I met with a handful of artists and/or writers, with the idea of trying to develope them for regular use. **Chuck Patten** from that group of people is now doing JUSTICE LEAGUE. A few of them have done one-shot jobs and a few others will do quite a bit more than that. I expanded that search to some of the conventions that I could get to. I looked at some of the portfolios and encouraged some people, and discouraged some of the others. And that is where the major mistake was made. We came up with too many people who have some ability. We couldn't communicate with that many people. That's why **Sal Amendola** is here today. We hired somebody to do that. We're setting up a regular program whereby the size of the group in the workshop has expanded considerably. It is still just one day a week, usually on Friday. It starts about two o'clock and it hangs on until about six or seven or until someone chases them out. Sal is the one who is most involved with that group. Though I structured the ideas, Sal is the one who makes it work.

JIM: *Has anyone come out of the Joe Kubert school yet?*

DICK: Oh sure, the people who are working for us right now include **Jan Duursema, Tom Yeats** and **Steve Bissette.** At Marvel, there are a good dozen people on the threshold. **Tod Smith** who lives in Connecticut is going to do a book for us now. He has done some inking for me personally, but he is on line to come in. **Jan Duursema's** husband, **Stan Drake,** is just that far away from producing useable material. There are a number of people who came from the Kubert school. But you've got to understand that the ones who are here now are members of the original freshman class. I taught them five years ago. From that intensive training it took them a lot of time to walk out that door and into this door. Although they learned a great deal in two years there was still a great deal to learn. The first thing is how to keep enough food in your belly to stay alive until someone will pay attention to you. In my mind, **Steve Bissette** was one of the best of them, but he has not made a strong mark in the industry. **Ron Randall** sort of hung on and hung on, and I think he is ready now to do some important stuff.

KLAUS: *You know one of the major criticisms of the comic industry is that it seems to have a self-perpetuating talent in the sense that the new people that are coming up have looked at comics, almost exclusively, and it seems the project that you're talking about the talent-look, seems to perpetuate the same thing. What is stopping DC or Marvel from reaching out and advertising to established artists, and pulling them in? And getting perhaps a different perspective on comics?*

DICK: I'll tell you what the major problem is. The people who buy comics aren't interested in illustrators who turn to comic books, or advertising artists who turn to comic books: KELLY GREEN drawn by **Stan Drake** is a beautiful piece of work. I guarnatee that it will sell two or three thousand copies in the direct sales market. I don't know why, but that kind of artwork is not favored by the fan market. I am ready to go with itm we have got illustrators that we could convert. We 'save **Nick Cardy** on the telephone every once in a while. The thing is that the fan market, the direct sales market is not terribly interested in their work. That is one of the reasons I am trying some strange ways to find out if there are any other markets out there, for something besides superheroes. Superheroes are our bread-and-butter, but every once in awhile I want to try a NATHANIEL DUSK just to see if there is anything out there. Some of the best stuff we have ever done here is nonsuperheroic. The SCALP-HUNTERS that **Gerry Conway** wrote are really good. The marketing problem is really all that is holding us back from experimenting in those areas. They are ready and able to come to work. You can now make as much money in comic books as you can in other fields. A gang of people made over one hundred thousand dollars this year.

JIM: *Another thing that I found upon talking to art directors in the field was that a lot of them, grew up as comic book fans and have detoured from comics, because they thought that there was no money in it.*

DICK: For years, I would put down that I was an illustrator, or a commercial artist, on loan applications. The change in the money situation is one of the things that made me come out of the closet as a comic-book artist. Now I put down "cartoonist," and do so proudly, because there was a different attitude about what a cartoonist or comic-book artist does. Art directors call me regularly because they know they'll get the kind of job that they want. Comic book artists are better for this. This is better for you, kid.

I made ten grand working for Ted Bates Advertising Agency last year, about twenty hours. Twenty hours, including an hour going back and forth to **Ted Bates.** That was an exception but the fact is that it is possible because the guy who called me is a comic books fan. He went to school with **Neal Adams** and I don't know why he didn't call Neal, but he has remembered comic books fondly throughout all of his life. When this job came up, he knew about me. I didn't know him.

JIM: *Now DC is*

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"Being a little hard of hearing is helpful."

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What DC superheroes eat for breakfast, according to an ad drawn by Giordano.

paying more attention to the direct sales fan audience. Are some of the older artists, who aren't exactly fan favorites, being shunted aside?

DICK: Oh, sure.

JIM: *Is there any solution to this?*

DICK: If you read Neal's editorial in COMICS JOURNAL a year back, you get the impression that age has something to do with it. It doesn't. Marketplace forces have more to do with it than anything. The fact of the matter is that, without naming too many names, some of the styles of some of the older artists simply are not saleable in the direct sales market. We can't use their sort of material. If we were making our decisions on the basis of age, we would have let **Curt Swan** go a long time ago, because he is older than the people who did leave. The same holds true for **George Tuska, Bob Oksner,** and a handful of others who seem to be able to sell. **Carmine Infantino** is probably close to in that age bracket now, and he is still working at both companies. It isn't a function of age, it is a question of keeping your material young enough to appeal to the fan market, understanding that market and being able to produce something that they are happy with. Carmine and **Tuska** and **Swan** will never enjoy the popularity of a **Keith Giffen** or a **George Perez,** but they sell enough material so that we don't have to apologize for their use.

JIM: *Do you think that certain writers can have as much effect as the artists in appealing to the fan market?*

DICK: That is a tricky question. I would have to answer, yes and no, at different times. Realistically, what you see when you pick up a comic is the art and it has to have its impact. There is no question about that. However, if what is between the covers isn't interesting and satisfying as a story, the art isn't going to sustain the book for any length of time. The cover might get you to pick up a comic book, the artwork might get you to buy it but in the final analysis if you don't have a good script you don't have anything. Of course, there are some people who buy comic books for the art.

KLAUS: *I assume that since DC has bought some of the Charlton characters, that DC is going to be using some of them . . .*

DICK: I can say that in '83 DC is going to release a number of new properties, before the year is out. Different kinds, everything from RONIN to ZERO MAN.

KLAUS: *Mini-series?*

DICK: Not too many, this year. Most of those are going to be ongoing titles of one kind or another. Some will be of the mini-series or maxi-series variety, but they are not the big thing. Next year, however, we'll be very big on mini-series and maxi-series. We are going to try new ideas and some of the good ideas that we had that weren't executed properly the first time around, and see if we can't put them in shape for today's marketplace. In addition, we are going to try to revitalize our five biggest heroes, Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern and Flash. They all need a little sprucing up. There might be some team changes, I don't know yet, but we are going to devote an entire year to making those five characters more interesting.

KLAUS: *Are you projecting that for '84 or '83?*

DICK: '84 on sale. I am starting on that right now. Four out of the five heroes have already had steps taken to effect those improvements. The new Robin is part of that, you know, trying to establish new relationships so that the character works a little better. That is the first thing that you will see. I don't want to talk too much about the others.

KLAUS: *I think part of that is also the relationship between Lois Lane and Superman and Lana Lang.*

DICK: That will be part of it, but I think that SUPERMAN will need more than just changes in the character relationships to make it work better. It needs a new look and a new approach to the storylines. And we have serious, serious problems with those five, which not many people want to hear about, that are very real for us. All of them — particularly SUPERMAN — are immensely popular in Europe. We are producing special SUPERMAN material for use in the European market alone, because everything we produce isn't enough to satisfy their needs. And the funny thing is that the kind of stories that they like are the **Mort Weisinger** kind of stories. You are at odds to produce

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"You're either getting better or worse."

the right kind of material. There isn't any way that we can do a story that will satisfy both worlds. We have to think of what we want to do.

KLAUS: *One of the answers is to try to do both.*

DICK: We have discussed a half a dozen different ways of doing this. But I don't want to talk about that too much now.

KLAUS: *How about graphic novels?*

DICK: Yeah, boy, there's a sore point. AfterWARLORDS and STAR RAIDERS, we have nothing in the works. We have contracts out on a few, plans and teams on a few, but nothing is in the works as of today. Basically, we don't have enough people around to take care of our regular lines of books. We painted ourselves into a corner. We have **Roy Thomas, Marv Wolfman,** and our five hottest artists all committed to do a graphic novel as soon as they get caught up with their regular line of books. That might not happen until 1989. So we went out and contacted some people — not second stringers, but people who were not committed to us, good writers, like **Steve Gerbers** and **Alan Brenner**ts of the world — and said, "Hey, how 'd you like to work . . ." And they said, "Sure, my contract is up in July, " or "Mine is up in September," or "I am busy until May." We got a lot of people that will do something for us, eventually. But I'm afraid that we are going to have a real tough time getting many out this year. That is one reason, incidentally, for wanting to do mini-series, so I don't commit everybody to a full year's worth of work. So when you sit down to work for me next year, you will do a four issue mini-series , and then you will do a graphic novel. But if I commit you to do twelve issues a year of a book, that is it.

JIM: *I spoke to Marv and he sounds very eager to do a graphic novel of TEEN TITANS.*

DICK: Marv has three that he is interested in doing. One is an original concept which I would like to do, one is a TEEN TITANS graphic novel which is useable anytime that we can get it together, and a SUPERMAN graphic novel has been discussed. The problem is merely time. Everytime we think we might get to that point, a new project comes up. We had the opportunity to do a book for the government. We used the TEEN TITANS in a drug-related story, a how-not-to book, actually three books. I said, "Marv, *please* don't do it, we can get somebody else to ! "George, *please* don't do it!" But they wanted to. Public service or whatever. They did twenty-eight pages. Nobody is going to care that *that* is why there is going to be a big gap between TEEN TITANS #29 and #30. And as I mentioned, Marv is developing a new character for us. George is finishing up some Atari-type stuff for us. George called me today and said, "Please, I need another month, I gotta have another month on JLA - AVENGERS, I really can't do it, *please!* "They know that the dates on the one - shots are changeable, all you have to do is go into somebody's office and change that three on a shipping schedule to a four and get by that way. And they are begging for mercy on the schedule that exists and that does not include a graphic novel. And they are all desparate to do one! So we are going to hold things together the best we can. We are going to get some people that are not working for us on a regular basis, and take things like the SWORDQUEST series that we did for Atari and do that comic-book size on good paper with processed seps and release it as a series, after it's all finished. So we'll publish as much of that good stuff as we can.

KLAUS: *So all of that is what DC will be doing in the future.*

DICK: That stuff — plus whatever comes to mind tomorrow morning!

KLAUS: *I believe it, too!*

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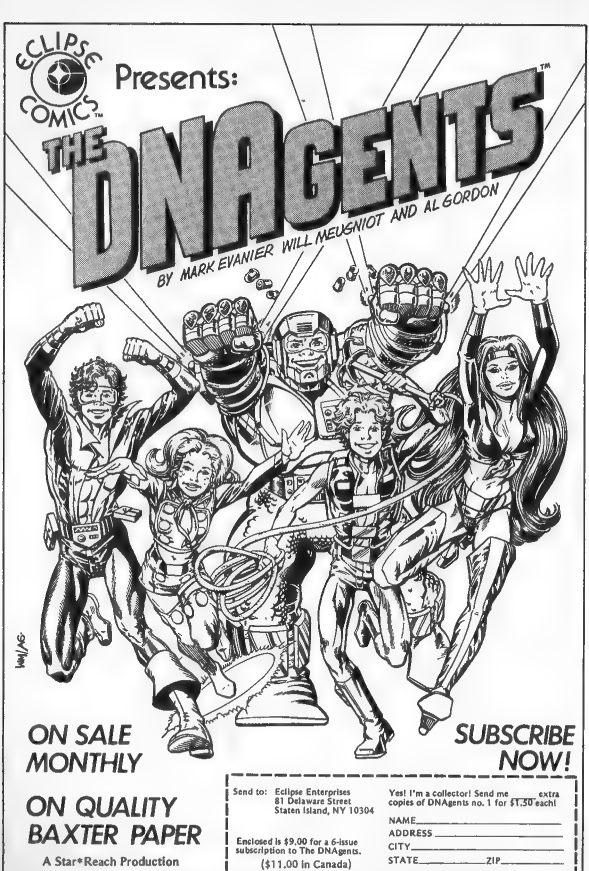

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"I couldn't do a superhero if I traced one."

Photo: Ron Fontes

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: John Costanza
Residence: Flanders, New Jersey
Born: Dover, New Jersey
Occupation: Busy.
Training: I took a Famous Artists School correspondence course. It is a good course. Mostly, I'm self-taught. I studied a lot of people's art. **Jack Davis** was a big influence on me. So was **Mort Drucker.** But I would just stare at **Davis'** stuff and put myself into his situation. I could just imagine what colors he laid down first. Whether he used brushes or pens and pencils. That is more or less how I trained myself.
Credits: NEW GODS, TARZAN, DEFENDERS, OMEGA MEN, TWEETY & SYLVESTER, etc
Pet Peeve: A lot of copy when I am lettering.
Fave Raves: I like chili and I like pizza. And I love sailing.
Favorite People: My wife and my three kids. I have three boys. My wife's name is Mary Lee. My oldest boy is named Neil, middle boy is named Brian, and my youngest is named Kevin. All Irish names — with an Italian father, and a Puerto Rican mother!

JOHN COSTANZA

"DC has changed, from the production

I'M VERY POPULAR IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD. EVERYONE KNOWS ME!
EVERYONE KNOWS YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE ALWAYS BRAGGING AND SHOWING OFF!
EVERYONE'S KNOWING YOU DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE POPULAR.

© 1983 Joy Wilt Berry

A John Costanza illustration from Joy Wilt Berry's LET'S TALK ABOUT SHOWING OFF.

If you've read a lot of comics, then you probably recognize John Costanza's name. He has lettered such stellar titles as CONAN, SWAMP THING, THE OMEGA MEN and many, many other DC and Marvel books over the last ten years. But how many of you know that besides writing and drawing comics such as TWEETY AND SYLVESTER, BUGS BUNNY, and YOSEMITE SAM for Western, John Costanza is also a noted illustrator of children's books? During one of his trips from New Jersey into Manhattan to deliver work, I corralled John for the following conversation . . .

DAK: *It's been quite a few years since we worked together on THE DEFENDERS, John. What are you doing these days?*

JOHN COSTANZA: I'm doing a lot of lettering for DC. I've just signed a three-year contract to letter exclusively for them. Aside from that, I'm also doing a lot of artwork for some HEATHCLIFF storybooks for Marvel, and a couple children's books for Western, and I'm doing some other work for a writer out in California. So I'm keeping pretty busy.

DAK: *Let's take it from the top, then. When you're lettering for DC, do you have specific assignments that you always do?*

JOHN: Yes, usually I do — unless I am running low on work, in which case they give me something out of the norm to do. They are very good about keeping me busy. DC has really changed right from the unsung heroes of the production department all the way up to the real Wonder Woman, **Jenette Kahn.** They are all terrific — to me, anyway.

DAK: *So you like being over there?*

JOHN: Yeah, absolutely. The rates are better and the working conditions are better, from what I see. Of course, I am looking at it from my basement, where I am working all the time.

DAK: *Your regular books are . . . ?*

JOHN: AMETHYST, LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES, RONIN, OMEGA MEN. I do a lot of **Len Wein's** books, like SWAMP THING.

DAK: *Sounds like you're working on all the best books.*

JOHN: They are pretty good books.

DAK: *Do you read the scripts as you letter the pages?*

JOHN: Absolutely. Unless I start lettering the pages out of sequence, which sometimes happens because I work on so many different books that I have to hop around. I may be working on the LEGION maybe half a day, and then jump over to THE SWAMP THING. Sometimes it gets hard to really get into a story, when I work that way.

DAK: *Which ones do you like?*

JOHN: WARLORD, because it has less copy. (Laughter.) Actually, I like THE OMEGA MEN. I think it is going to be one of DC's best sellers. I've really enjoyed lettering the books, especially the second issue.

DAK: *How long does it take you to letter a page?*

JOHN: An average page can take twenty to thirty minutes, but you can get into a page that can take you up to an hour.

DAK: *Do you letter full time?*

From Western's TWEETY AND SYLVESTER, drawn by John Costanza.

FISH HEAD IS IT! MY SNIFFER NEVER LIES!
SYLVESTER, DAHLING! AREN'T YOU GOING TO OFFER SOME TO A LADY?
THE FISH HEAD'S ALL MINE, AND I DON'T LIKE THE WAY YOU TREAT A LADY!
OOOF!
POW!

© 1983 Warner Bros. Inc.

department all the way up to Jenette Kahn."

© 1983 Aim Records, Inc.

Album-cover artwork by John Costanza.

JOHN: In order to get out the amount of lettering that I do, I have to. I am working constantly. My days are pretty long. I'll work at night and I'll work on weekends on the children's stuff — but, to me, that isn't work, when I go into my artwork. I can do that continuously with practically no sleep. I enjoy that and it keeps me going. I do some artwork for Western, for Marvel and for other odd projects that come in.

DAK: *What are you doing at Western?*

JOHN: At Western, I have two PAC-MAN books that I'll be inking. Actually I did all the artwork and I'm onto the inking part now. These are children's books, not comic books. The covers will be painted. I've painted one already. And I am doing HEATHCLIFF stuff for Marvel Books. I am illustrating text storybooks in full color.

DAK: *Did you just illustrate the PAC-MAN books or did you also write them.*

JOHN: No, I didn't write any of the children's books.

DAK: *You also do comic books for Western, right?*

JOHN: TWEETY AND SYLVESTER, YOSEMITE SAM, and BUGS BUNNY. I just finished a BUGS BUNNY comic/storybook for them. It's a different format than a regular comic. There are some big hopes for that book. Western will be publishing it along with three or four other different books in the same format.

DAK: *Do you just do artwork now?*

JOHN: No, I do quite a bit of writing. Well, I *used* to do quite a bit of writing. All I can say is that things are cut back at Western, as far as their comic books go. I am working more with their children's books. But I used to do a lot of writing for TWEETY AND SYLVESTER and YOSEMITE SAM. Another character they used to have which I wrote was Western's own character, CRACKY. He's a parrot. A detective-type parrot. That was a fun character to work on, too. Unfortunately, CRACKY wasn't well-known, like the other characters I mentioned. It had a hard time getting off the ground.

DAK: *How long have you been in comics?*

JOHN: I've been lettering since 1968. A

"DC's Romance books used a photograph of just

© 1983 Warner Bros. Inc

From a BUGS BUNNY storybook drawn by Costanza.

couple of years after that, I got into doing professional artwork for Western. They stuck with me from the start, right from the beginning, when the stuff was hardly recognizable. They stayed with me and it got better and better. So I think I am going to stay with them for a while since they've treated me well. **Paul Kuhn** gave me my start in a little MARCH OF COMICS book called SMOKEY THE BEAR.

DAK: *You once told me about having your photo printed in a lot of DC comics...*

JOHN: Yeah, they used a photograph of my face for the romance books. They used to call it MARK, ON THE MAN'S SIDE. It was sort of a male, "Dear Abby." A really obnoxious character. But I had nothing to do with it outside of their using my photograph. As a matter of fact, they even published that photo again, in a hardcover collection, and they also used it on the cover of a comic book. It's pretty rare — when you get a photograph of somebody on the cover of a comic book.

DAK: *Same picture?*

JOHN: Same picture. As a matter of fact, a couple of years later, after I hadn't been working for DC for a couple of years, I came over to Marvel to do some lettering for them, and they used the same photograph. Only they drew some sideburns on it, and I believe a mustache or something, to update it.

DAK: *The girls would write to you?*

JOHN: Yeah! Some of the letters were okay, some were not too complimentary. (Laughter.) However, I had nothing to do with the answers.

DAK: *You're also doing some work for a writer on the West Coast?*

JOHN: I believe she is a psychologist. She writes children's books like, "you shouldn't steal," "you should listen to your parents," educational books for children of different ages. I am more-or-less in a young children's category. I enjoy the very young children.

A Costanza pencil-sketch for DC's CAPTAIN CARROT AND HIS AMAZING ZOO CREW.

© 1983 DC Comics, Inc.

my head. It was for a male 'Dear Abby' column."

© 1981 Walt Disney Prods.

Winnie the Pooh, drawn by Costanza.

DAK: *You've never made a stab at doing super-heroes?*

JOHN: I could never do that. I couldn't do a super-hero if I traced one. It's just not in me. I have been drawing children's stuff ever since I was a young boy and worked in my grandfather's barber shop. I would be in the back room drawing pictures on paper bags. Everybody has the same story. That's the beginning of my success story. My grandfather would hang them up over the cash register. He was the first one to give me any kind of encouragement. He would show the customers my drawings. Everything that I drew looked good to me then. Right to this day, when I hand in a project, it still looks good to me. But when I look back on it years later, I say, "Geez, how could anybody ever have accepted this?" That's why I feel the way I do about Western. They stuck with me when the stuff was really rough . . . I am hoping now that my work has gotten a little better!

DAK: *I saw some children's books that you had done for various other children's publishers, besides Western . . .*

JOHN: Some WINNIE THE POOH stuff, and some material for Peter Pan Industries. I've done a lot of work for them — record covers, books, songbooks. I'm good at that.

DAK: *With all the writing and illustrating that you've done, why do you still stick with lettering?*

JOHN: It comes easy to me. Lettering comes easy and I guess you might say it is a security blanket for me. Besides, people want me to letter. I like to see a good book being put out. I'll probably never give up lettering. I'll never give up drawing, either. I have to do it, you know.

DAK: *Have you done any logo lettering for record albums or posters?*

JOHN: I'm really not into **Gaspar Saladino**-type logo lettering. He is terrific. I wouldn't think of doing that type of lettering.

DAK: *Do you have any big projects in the works?*

JOHN: I did write a children's story myself. I haven't shown it to anyone yet. But I have hopes for that. It will let people know that I do other things. These will be my own little animal characters. I have a few other ideas in mind that are not developed enough to tell you about. They are just bouncing around in my head. As soon as I get time, I will sit down and put them together. I will have time for it someday.

DAK: *Did you work at Marvel back when Stan Lee was editor?*

JOHN: Yes, Stan took me into his office one day, and sat me down — that was when **John Verpoorten** was alive, he was a great guy who helped me along the way — and Stan explained to me exactly the type of lettering that he wanted and that was it. After that, we got along just fine. And I haven't seen him since!

DAK: *What did he have to say about lettering? What was Stan's point of view?*

JOHN: Whatever I did at DC, he wanted the opposite! If the balloons were floating at DC, he wanted them touching the panel borders at Marvel. Small things like that. He was really a very nice guy. I liked him.

DAK: *What drives you to do all this work?*

JOHN: I try to self-analyze a little bit and I really think that I am searching for the project that I can have fun with. Like I used to have back in my grandfather's barber shop. I thought of this many times. You are always looking and searching for different projects to work on to have fun, because once you get into this business — I would tell anyone who wants to get into this business, whether they are in art school or just at their kitchen table, drawing for fun — this whole business, once you are into it, it isn't fun anymore. You really have to search for that special project. And when it comes up, it is nice. And that is what I think I am doing. That is why I keep jumping from one project to another. I tried writing so I could write the type of project that I wanted to work on. That is what keeps me going.

DAK: *You don't anticipate taking a year off or anything?*

JOHN: Not a year, no. Couple of weeks is fine for me, four weeks is fine. I think I'd go crazy, if I took a year off — I'd go really whacky. Could you take a year off?

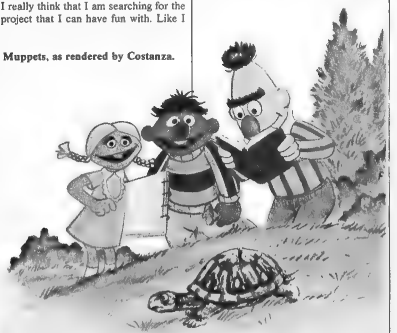
DAK: *Yeah, I did.*

JOHN: Oh, God bless you, I couldn't. But I have a twenty-two-foot sail boat. And I love that. I can't wait for this weather to break so I can get out on that boat. I'd love to have a job that I could do on board, so I could spend all my time on it.

DAK: *I guess it is a little too choppy out there to letter on board . . .*

JOHN: If I had something to write, I certainly could accomplish some writing on the boat!

Muppets, as rendered by Costanza.



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"I am probably more of a salesman out

here. Selling is really very difficult."

STAN LEE

Stan Lee needs no introduction — he is Marvel Comics, personified. During this past winter and spring, seldom-seen Stan paid a couple surprise visits to the Marvel Bullpen in New York, during one of which Jim Salicrup showed him xeroxes of COMICS INTERVIEW #1. Lee's enthusiasm was immediate — "Why isn't Marvel publishing this?" — and he made a point of dropping by my office to offer well wishes. I broached the idea of doing an interview, but Stan's schedule was too tight — so Jim and I finally bearded him in his lair via a long-distance call . . .

STAN LEE: Hello, Mr. Kraft? Lee here. Mr. Salicrup?

JIM SALICRUP: *It took four Vice-Presidents to figure out how to operate the phones over here.*

STAN: Jesus Christ! And it takes two of you to handle this interview, huh?

DAK: *We figured we'd double team you.*

STAN: One of you to listen, the other to translate

DAK: *It must have been quite a transition to start out writing comics and end up heading an animation studio.*

STAN: As you may recall, when I first left New York to come out here, I wasn't really scripting that many comics. I had stopped. So it wasn't that much of a break — the biggest change has been the change of locale, and the fact that I am not now as responsible for the comics as I was back in New York.

DAK: *How does what you do differ?*

STAN: Working at Marvel in New York, whatever it was we wanted to do — we just did. If we wanted to publish a magazine, say, we published it. Out here, if we want to do a movie, that is only the first step. We then have to convince a production company, we have to convince a distributor to help finance it, and so forth. In a way, I am probably more of a salesman out here.

DAK: *Would you say that your life is more busy, or less, since the days when you used to write all of those comics?*

STAN: I think more busy. When I wrote all the books in the early 1960s, it didn't seem difficult. I would write a book a day. I worked weekends. I'd go to the office two or three days a week. The rest of the time I'd stay home and write. At the office, I would be editing what I had already written, mostly working with the artist, asking him to change a long-shot to a close-up, or to change an expression or to emphasize another pose or whatever, and I would try to make sure that the lettering was just right. I'd slave over the sound effects. I'd spend a lot of time on the credits to find new ways of doing them. Then I would spend time writing the Bullpen Page. Somehow, I had the time for all that, because there was nothing else interfering. I was totally enmeshed and absorbed in just doing all that.

Today, I am doing so many totally different things that it is a little bit more difficult. I'll be spending a couple of hours trying to move some motion picture along, then I'll be talking to **David DePatie** about some of the animated stuff, and then I'll be selling something to the network. Then I'll be scripting the newspaper strip, or making a long-distance call to **Sol Brodsky** to make corrections on a line of lettering or the art. Then I'll have to edit some script for TV. There is never really a minute to catch my breath. And I am not saying it complainingly, but I do think it was easier years ago when I was involved with magazine stuff.

JIM: *Do you wish that you had the time to get back into writing?*

STAN: Oh, yeah. In fact, I just signed to do a SILVER SURFER graphic novel. **Keith Pollard** is going to draw it. I am very excited about that. I told **Stroter** if he could get somebody that worked from a very simple synopsis like **Kirby, Ditko, Romita, Buscema, Kane** and **Colan** used to do, I would love to do a SILVER SURFER book as a regular comic. But I guess he hasn't been able to find anybody.

DAK: *How did you go about convincing them to do the Marvel Saturday morning cartoons?*

STAN: It was a selling job. First of all, we had to convince the networks that we had the ability, the capability, the know-how and the dependability. Luckily, **David DePatie** has climbed aboard as the President of Marvel Productions, and his great credentials gave us a certain credibility with the networks. Beyond that, we had to submit outlines — what they call "bibles" of the entire concepts of the

"I am always trying for something that eludes me."

shows — and, finally, we made the sale.

JIM: *What is on the drawing board now for future Marvel productions?*

STAN: It works in seasons. The selling season won't start for another few months. But when it does, we have a number of children's things, like THE SMURFS. And some *new* superheroes. But there is no way of ever predicting which the networks will buy and which they won't. Right now, it is really much easier to sell something that is already an established success in other fields.

JIM: *How did Marvel Productions hook up with Fred Silverman's company?*

STAN: He came to us. He apparently had a choice of almost every animation company, but felt we would do the best job. He had two ideas for two shows. I am sorry, he had an idea for two shows. Because two ideas for two shows would be more ideas. *(Laughter.)* He asked us if we would go partners with him and we did. The shows were basically his — they were his concepts. We merely produced them for him.

JIM: *How are SPIDEY and THE HULK doing?*

STAN: Well, SPIDER-MAN did just fine — it was renewed. NBC didn't seem to have room for THE HULK in this season's schedule, so we will just have SPIDER-MAN on NBC. And, on CBS, we will have DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS. And we may sell one or two other shows in mid-season.

DAK: *On Marvel's animated HULK series, it seemed that you had more personal input than into some of the others.*

STAN: Actually, I had about the same amount of input in all of them — but maybe you felt that way because, in some ways, THE HULK was a little closer to the original stories. But even there, we did some things that the networks wanted that weren't in the original HULK. They always want as wide an ethnic mix as possible, so on the show we introduced a Mexican restaurant owner and his daughter. Another reason they want characters like that is to get more "girl appeal," and they thought that his daughter would help. I think one of the problems with THE HULK was that it still didn't have enough female appeal. I think that a lot of boys tuned into it and, judging by the mail that we have received, they liked it. But I think perhaps not enough girls found it to their liking.

JIM: *How did you get started narrating the cartoons?*

STAN: It was the network's idea. They asked me if I would do it and I never say "no" to anything. It sounded like fun.

DAK: *Did you have to do many dubbings?*

STAN: Actually, no. I would do quite a few at one time, and that was it. The only thing that bothered me was that I wasn't really writing it, so it wasn't always the way I would have done it. When doing a script for SPIDER-MAN or THE HULK, the writer would put the narration in. The scripts are all very carefully timed — it is part of the animation process. The narration had to go where the writer put it. There were times where I wanted the narration at other places during the show, but once it was already arranged as is was, it couldn't be changed. The only freedom I had with the narration was changing the words, trying to make the bits of narration sound like my own style. But, in the best of all possible worlds, I would have preferred doing it from scratch and putting the narration in where I felt it should have gone.

DAK: *What is a typical Stan Lee day like?*

STAN: I get up around a quarter to six, and I usually spend anywhere from a half hour to an hour on the phone, calling people in the East, because that is the best time to reach them. At home, also, I go through a lot of notes and prepare a lot of papers and so forth, because I don't have time to do it in the office. I finally get to the studio around nine-thirty. My day here really depends on the mail on my desk and the messages I receive over the phone. For example, there may be a message that I have to go over to NBC for

Original animation cel from Marvel's production of a Fred Silverman idea — MEATBALLS AND SPAGHETTI.

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"I don't consider myself that much a success."

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MARVEL PRODUCTIONS, LTD
THE INCREDIBLE HULK
"THE ORIGIN OF THE HULK"
Written by: Dennis Marks
Prod. Draft: May 1983
6-11-83
STORYBOARD / LARRY HOUSTON
100-06 ACT I
SCENE 86 87 95
Page 1 Prod. -05
(just to talk about)
ACT ONE
NARRATION
BY, I'm GLAD SAM! We all know the Hulk is the strongest and the strangest creature on Earth! Now, hang onto your hats, things are about to get where we learn how he got that way
STORY TO THIS DIALOG OVER FIRST 3 SCENES
(MAN START)
(STOP)
OPEN TIGHT ON SUNSET & CORNER ONE IN CACTUS, TRUCK OUT & PAN (L) TO (R) TRUCK-IN..
HOT MEXICAN DESERT - DAY - DUSK
Remote, isolated, with mountain in the distance. Silence.
(ADD WIND & LEAVES BLOWING)
and coming to stop at a jack rabbit which is munching on some desert flora.
TRUCK-IN
the CAMERA PANS across the desert
NARRATOR (VO) Night is falling on a lonely outpost in New Mexico
NARRATOR All is silence!

Storyboard for Marvel's animated HULK television show.

some reason, or to Warner Brothers to discuss some movie we are trying to sell. Or I may have people to meet — a writer, say, who is working on something we are trying to present as a television or movie production. He may have hit a snag that we can talk over. Or there may be scripts on my desk which I have to read. The day's schedule all really depends on whatever problems I find facing me that morning.

JIM: *Are there any new Marvel movie deals coming up?*

STAN: There are a lot of projects that we are working on, but one of the things I learned is that— even if you get a producer to say, "I'll produce a movie for you," and you start working on the script — it still doesn't mean that movie will ever hit the screen, because there are so many other mazes you have to go through. Now, it looks like we have a good shot at having about six or eight movies actually filmed, but at the moment they are all in various phases of development.

JIM: *Anything you can talk about?*

STAN: Well, one of them is THE HUMAN TORCH, which **Irwin Allen** of THE TOWERING INFERNO is producing for Columbia Pictures.

JIM: *Instead of a building on fire, it will be a human being?*

STAN: I have not had time to actually discuss the story yet. **Allen** is interviewing a lot of people to select the one who is going to write the script. That seems to be as definite as this sort of thing can be at the moment. Then **Roger Corman** is doing a version of SPIDER-MAN which I understand will possibly be one of the most expensive films he's ever done. He sold his studio, New World Productions, to someone — but I understand that he hung onto SPIDER-MAN, because he wants to do that, himself.

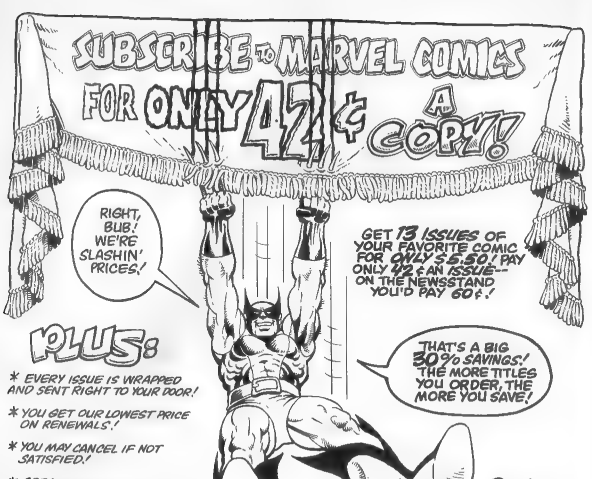
JIM: *Do you sense another SUPERMAN movie there?*

STAN: Let's hope it will be that successful!

JIM: *Speaking of SPIDER-MAN, Jack Kirby has given several interviews lately, in which he has claimed credit for creating SPIDER-MAN . . .*

STAN: I really don't know what to say about that. I honestly don't understand it. Years ago, when I wanted to do SPIDER-MAN, I called Jack and told him: "I want to do a character called SPIDER-MAN who sticks to the walls, who does this and who does that." And I told him I wanted him to draw it, how I wanted it done, and I told him I didn't want it done in his usual style. I didn't want the character to look too heroic or too monster-like. I wanted him to look like an average guy. Jack did a few pages. I saw them and said, "No, it is all wrong. Let's forget it, Jack. It is just not your style." I took it away from him and gave it to **Steve Ditko**. I don't know whether this is the case or not, but maybe when **Ditko** did the story, he used the costume that Jack created. I don't remember. I guess **Ditko** and Jack are the only two guys who know that. If **Ditko** is still around, I'd appreciate it if you would ask him and let me know the answer. And if, indeed, the costume is the one that Jack originally drew, that may be what Jack means when he says that he, created SPIDER-MAN. But in no way, shape, manner or means did **Jack Kirby** create SPIDER-MAN. I don't even know how he can dare to say that. It is the one strip that we did that he had virtually nothing to do with at all, except for a few pages that we never used.

JIM: *I think it was in an interview in Will Eisner's SPIRIT magazine that he said he and Joe Simon had come up with a character called the Silver Spider.*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- FANTASTIC FOUR
- G.I. JOE
- INCREDIBLE HULK
- INDIANA JONES
- IRON MAN
- MARVEL TALES
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"The SUPERMAN movie was done Marvel-style."

Jack went on to say that he was pushing you to do superheroes at Marvel, and you were his vehicle to get it to Martin Goodman and start the Marvel Age of Comics.

STAN: Well, I think that Jack has taken leave of his senses. I have never heard of the Silver Spider. Jack never pushed me to do superheroes. What happened was, one day, **Martin Goodman** called me into the office -- this is when Jack and I were doing all those monster stories -- and Martin, who was publisher at the time, said: "You know, Stan, I've just seen some sales figures for this DC magazine" -- it may have been the JUSTICE LEAGUE, but I no longer remember -- "it is doing pretty well. Maybe we ought to do some superheroes." And I said, "Fine." And he said, "Let's do a team like the JUSTICE LEAGUE." And I said, "Fine." I went home and wrote an outline, a synopsis for the FANTASTIC FOUR. And I called Jack, handed him the outline, and said: "Read this. This is something I want to do. And you should draw a team." Jack, of course, contributed many, many ideas to it. And I would venture to say that Jack and I co-created THE FANTASTIC FOUR, in a way -- although the name was mine, the characters were mine, the concept was mine, originally. But he never pushed me to do superheroes. Jack was at home drawing these monster stories, until the day I called him and said: "Let's do the FANTASTIC FOUR." I think Jack is really -- I don't know what to say, I don't want to say anything against him. I think he is beginning to imagine things.

DAK: *I know he did some work on the recent FANTASTIC FOUR cartoon series for Marvel Productions. I'm wondering if you ever saw him or worked with him?*

STAN: I haven't seen Jack in a couple of years. Considering all the stuff I hear he is running around saying, it is probably just as well that I don't see him.

JIM: *Getting back to SPIDER-MAN, you're still working on the syndicated strip, right?*

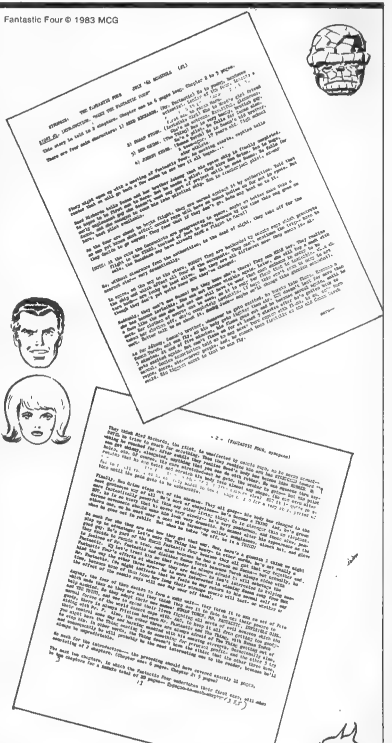
STAN: Yeah, well, Jack will probably claim he does that, too.

DAK: *I remember seeing you write a three-panel strip while you were walking the hall at the Bullpen one day .*

STAN: Really? That was probably one of the better ones! *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Besides all your other activities, you also created some new characters for Marvel Books called BUGS.*

STAN: Oh, I forgot about that. When **Jim Galton** and I were in Italy at the



Pages from Stan Lee's original plot for the first FANTASTIC FOUR story.

"Actually, I'm sort of like Old Faith-

Bologna book fair — I think it was two years ago — we saw a lot of little characters that we don't hear about much in the States — and we were saying, "Gee, it would be nice if we could come up with something like that." So I got this idea for a feature called BUGS, which maybe could be a series of children's books, or a television series. I tried to give each of them an individual personality. And so far we've done a giant-sized coloring book, and four little books — the kind we call "board books" because they're made of heavy "board" stock for very young kids — all to be published by Marvel Books.

JIM: *Stan, I also wanted to ask what you consider to be your secret of success?*

STAN: I don't know. It is a funny thing. I really don't consider myself all that much a success. It seems that there is always something that I am trying for that eludes me. Right now, I have been out here for a couple of years, but we still don't have a movie on the screen, and so I am a little frustrated about that. Until we have a few more successes out here, I have a ways to go before I can consider myself another **Stephen Spielberg.** *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *When you think about how far you've come from the days when you were doing those monster books, Stan, you would have to consider yourself, I think, successful.*

STAN: Well, I guess so, I guess in that perspective. A book publisher asked me to write my autobiography — I guess some would consider me a success. But I really don't think about it that much. I think the thing that makes life so enjoyable is always that you are shooting for something. When you sit back and think, "Oh, boy, how terrific it is," I think that is when you begin to slide down.

JIM: *You said that you consider yourself a salesman. What advice would you give to people — how would you explain your approach in trying to sell ideas?*

STAN: I think the most important thing in selling is to make sure that you have a good product that you, yourself, believe in. The next most important thing is that you better to be able to explain it as colorfully and as dramatically as possible, to make the person that you are presenting it to want it so badly that he drools at the mouth. I guess you have to be half actor / half politician and diplomat. Selling is really very difficult. In fact, the longer I hang around this business — by "this business," I guess I mean anything creative — the more I realize that there is much more selling to it than one would think. Even if you are an artist or a writer, the point is in convincing other people that what you are doing is good. Either people don't know or they are afraid to trust their own judgment. They need you to tell them that is good and to convince them — so that they start to believe it. Examples are the television series that are so awful you say, "How the hell did anybody buy that?" Somebody did a helluva good selling job, that's how.

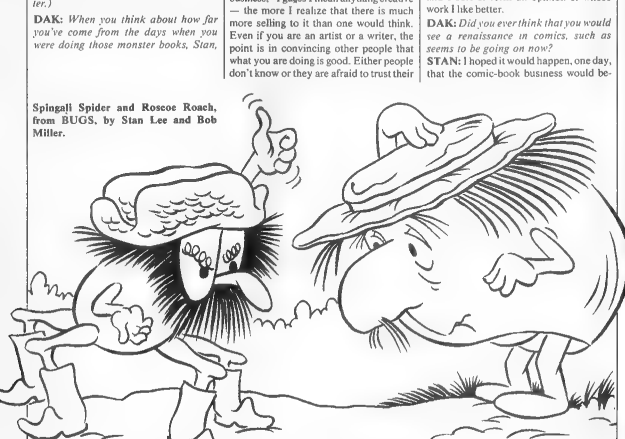
DAK: *Lately, there is sort of a feeling "out there" that you don't keep up with the comics anymore and are removed from the field. Do you read comics? Do you follow them at all?*

STAN: I am sorry to say, there is a little bit of truth to that. We publish — what is it? — forty comics a month, and there just aren't enough hours in the day for me to read them all. I would love to, but I can't. They arrive in a pile at the office and whenever I can get a few minutes — if I am waiting for a phone call or somebody is late for a meeting — I will thumb through them to see who is drawing what, and which writers are scripting them. Without reading a story, you can still absorb some of the feeling of the book just by thumbing through it — so I do that. At least I know what the books *look* like. I have a rough idea of who is doing what, and I sort of form an opinion of whose work I like better.

DAK: *Did you ever think that you would see a renaissance in comics, such as seems to be going on now?*

STAN: I hoped it would happen, one day, that the comic-book business would be-

Spingall Spider and Roscoe Roach, from BUGS, by Stan Lee and Bob Miller.



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ful. I'm the typical company man."

come very lively. The renaissance that I am thrilled with is not so much a lot of comics publishers springing up as ourselves publishing so many different formats, which I think is just wonderful. The idea of giving writers and artists more of a proprietory interest is something that I hoped would happen for as long as I can remember, and it is something we were always shooting for. In a way, I think that the comic-book industry is becoming so much better and more glamorous — and the quality is improving to such a degree — that it does make me regretful that I am not still a part of it. I think this would be one of the most exciting times to still be in comics.

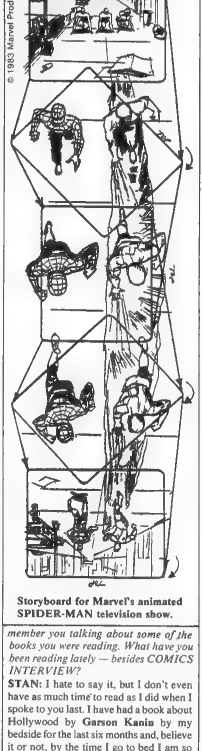
DAK: *What are you interested in these days, Stan? Have your personal interests changed over the years? Do you have any new enthusiasms?*

STAN: Oh, yeah! That is one thing that I think I have always had — enthusiasm. One of the newest kicks in my life is my word processor. To me, especially if you are a writer, a word processor is an absolutely quintessential adult toy, and I am absolutely ecstatic about the one I just bought. In fact, I thought it would speed up my writing, but it actually slowed it down, because whereas I would put a page in a typewriter and just go bang on the keys and write as fast as possible, when I put the word processor on, I write a few sentences and look up and say, "Gee, it might look better, if I had said it this way." And I go back over it. It is fascinating to watch the things change on the screen, as if by magic. So I find that I am rewriting and rewriting and rewriting because it is so enjoyable. It is taking me twice as long, but I am writing three times as much, because in the past I would have to force myself to sit down at the typewriter since writing is such a rotten chore, but now I can't wait to get home to the word processor.

Also, I am enthusiastic about our animation studio. Our artists are terrific and the nicest people in the world. They are a great team to work with, not unlike the Bullpen type of family. I regret that there isn't a little more contact between the creative people here and at Marvel in New York. But it just seems to be impossible, because they are so far away and are working on different things. Also, I am enthusiastic about our movie and television projects, and a little frustrated that things don't move just a little faster out here. But, oh, yeah — there is so much going on that I would have to be a real lunk-head not to be enthusiastic!

JIM: *When you were here last, I remember you talking about some of the books you were reading. What have you been reading lately — besides COMICS INTERVIEW?*

STAN: I hate to say it, but I don't even have as much time to read as I did when I spoke to you last. I have had a book about Hollywood by **Garson Kanin** by my bedside for the last six months and, believe it or not, by the time I go to bed I am so tired that I haven't been able to lift it up and read it. I haven't even started! And I have been wanting to read **Robert Ludlum's** latest thing and I just haven't had time. In the morning I try, while I am having breakfast, to read my newspaper. And then, during the day, I have to read VARIETY and the HOLLYWOOD REPORTER to see what is going on. Thumbing through our comics in odd moments just doesn't leave an extra minute during the day for reading.



Storyboard for Marvel's animated SPIDER-MAN television show.

JIM: *Manage to squeeze in any of those famous Hollywood parties we all hear so much about?*

STAN: No. I guess they exist. Not really as many as you think. We had one party at my house around Christmas time, which was just wonderful. I invited a lot of people we had worked with, from the studios and so forth. I invited more than I thought the house would hold, because the weather is nice and I figured the terrace would hold the overflow of guests. Naturally, with my luck, that night we had the very first rainstorm, so nobody could go outside, and I had a hundred people inside the house. Luckily, it worked out — the house must have been a little bigger than I thought it was. It was a nice party, but not a wild party. I think you have to go back to New York for that!

JIM: *Are there any Hollywood stars that you'd like to meet?*

STAN: Every one. When I sit in a restaurant with my wife, I'll say, "Oh look, there is **Jack Lemmon**!" I always get a kick out of it.

JIM: *How about Stan Lee, the celebrity? Have you ever found people noticing you on the streets?*

STAN: Oh, very rarely. Occasionally, someone will remember me from a picture or lecture somewhere, and come over. One thing that was funny, I signed my American Express card at a restaurant, and the women said: "Hey, you are not THE **Stan Lee** are you?" And I said, "As a matter of fact, THE **Stan Lee** is a guy in dry cleaning in Manhattan." She got a kick out of that. So did I.

JIM: *I am surprised you haven't done any American Express commercials yet.*

STAN: They asked me to, about five years ago, and it just happened that I had done a commercial for Persona razor blades at the time. I was just about to sign to do the American Express one when somebody at the agency said, "Wait a minute, you just did one for Persona. Everybody is going to recognize you. It won't work." That was years ago, and I am waiting for American Express to call again. I think they forgot about it.

JIM: *Have you been in contact with Alain Resnais about the screenplay you*

"Jack Kirby would change my plot so much I

wrote that he was going to film — THE MONSTER MAKER?

STAN: As a matter of fact, we had lunch in Paris a week and a half ago. He is a really wonderful guy, and I don't mean that in a phony Hollywood way — he really *is* a wonderful guy. I thought we would do the movie before this, but he was busy doing another movie which will be coming out in America this Fall. I think. It is going to be called LIFE IS A NOVEL in English, but Alain can't decide whether to call it that or LIFE IS NOT A NOVEL. It's some idiom in French that means more to them than it would to Americans. Anyway, now he has another movie to do, and I keep waiting for us both to finally find some spare time and go on and do it. I understand Twentieth Century-Fox has shown an interest. It is all so confusing, because of Alain being in France and me being here, so we never seem to have time to sit down and really talk about it.

DAK: *Well, gee, it sure sounds glamorous to hear, "I was in Paris the other day, having lunch."*

STAN: Let me say that this is the first time I have been in Europe for over a year, and it just happens that you are phoning me after I got back. I don't do this every week.

JIM: *Whatever happened to the BLACK WIDOW project Harlan Ellison was working on?*

STAN: I have seen a little bit of Harlan since that time. He has got the funniest house you have saw in your life. It is the house every kid dreams of having when he grows up, filled with toys and gadgets. The whole house is like a toy museum. What happened was that somebody was interested in a television version of THE BLACK WIDOW and I guess they asked Harlan to write it. And I waited and I waited and I waited. He said he would do it, but he never sent it to me and, finally, the project died because the fellow who wanted to do it got another show, instead. So we never did it. I met him a while after that and he apologized — he said he just hadn't been well and there was something that he couldn't talk about. I have always liked Harlan and I wasn't about to let that spoil our friendship. But that is the story of THE BLACK WIDOW.

JIM: *I'll just drop a couple more names. Paul McCartney — have you heard from him lately?*

STAN: No. When I was in London a few years ago, he called me at the hotel where I was staying. I think it was the funniest story in the world, because I never knew him. He said, "Hello, Stan. This is Paul." "Paul who?" When he told me, I thought somebody was putting me on. And he said, "What are you doing in a hotel? Why didn't you come over and visit us right away?" I thought, "He's crazy. He thinks this is somebody else." He wanted to start a musical group for Linda, a group called SUZY AND THE RED STRIPES.

We just couldn't seem to make contact again. We called each other a few times. He was always in some other part of the world than I was and that was sort of the end of it

JIM: *You meet many rock stars out in California?*

STAN: I have met a few guys who are involved in that scene — but, no, I haven't really met any rock stars. We live one house away from **Cheryl Ladd,** and **Joe Wolff,** the producer of HALLOWEEN, is our next door neighbor. **Tanya Roberts** is a friend of my daughter, and was at our party. A good friend of mine is **Ken Johnson,** producer of the live-action HULK series, who did the show that aired recently, called V. I was in Europe when it was on, but I understand that it blew everything else away in the ratings. Did you like it?

JIM: *I saw both parts. I think they left it open-ended so that they could lead into a sequel.*

STAN: Yes, they hoped it would be a series. Well, Ken is also working with us on a SUB-MARINER movie. If we do it, Ken would write it. So I have got my fingers crossed. I think V, because it was a great ratings success, will help us very much.

It is good talking to you guys. How is your magazine doing, Dave?

DAK: *Great! It has gone monthly. That's driving me wild, but the readers are very supportive and the magazine is doing well. Getting back to you, Stan — is there anything else you want to cover or state for the record?*

STAN: I should have prepared something. How about: "Excelsior." Someday, I might find out what that means. The only thing I want to say is that I really *love* what I am doing. I am enjoying every minute of it, but I must admit it is a contradiction, a paradox in a way, that I very much miss the comics industry. I wish that Los Angeles were just around the corner from New York, so I could be hopping over there all the time . . . although it just may be that the guys in New York are just as happy with me 3000 miles away. But that is the only thing that I miss. I miss the magazines and the Bullpen, the excitement of the comics. But I do feel that the comic-book industry has never seen such interesting days or stood closer to realizing its potential as right now. And it makes me a little sorry that I am not as much a part of it as I would like to be. But there are always some little regrets in life and you can never have everything.

THE "PANDA HUDDLE"
GROWL
THIS MEANS WHA-LA WILL ROT-YOUR TEETH!
WHERE HOPPER WAITERS?
BY!
THEY DO THIS WHEN THEY WANT TO SPEAK AMONG THEMSELVES WITH SHRIEKS OF PRIVACY — LIKE "PANDA-LAW" OR "PANDANESE" — I THINK THE KIDS WILL RELATE TO THIS AND LOVE IT!!
THE "PANDA PYRAMID" OR FEDERATION
THIS IS A FEDERATION THEY GET INTO WHICH CREATES A "PROTECTIVE AURA" AROUND THEM — WHICH MAKES THEM LOOK LIKE ONE LARGE PANDA!

Background material for Marvel Productions PANDAMONIUM.

© 1983 Marvel Productions

couldn't recognize it. Which was fine with me."

As we were going to press, we had an eleventh-hour opportunity to slip in some added details and specifics on Stan's Hollywood doings — and we snapped at the chance. The following absolutely under-the-wire update, conducted by Dan Hagen, clarifies a couple points raised in the previous interview, as well as offering Stan's opinions on some additional topics of interest . . .

DAN: *I was thinking today I've probably read more words of yours than any other author's.*

STAN: I've probably written more words that have been published than anybody else. Someday I ought to contact the Guinness Book of World Records.

DAN: *Do you ever feel any twinges of regret that you haven't yet written the Great American Novel?*

STAN: Sure, always. And I always figure I'll do it next year. It's a funny thing. There used to be an ad that ran in the newspapers by some guy who was selling a course on how to make a lot of money. The headline used to be, 'Most Men Are Too Busy Working to Ever Get Rich.' And I have a feeling I've always been too busy writing to ever write anything that would be meaningful, like a book or a play or a screenplay.

DAN: *How many comics were you writing at your peak, do you think?*

STAN: I think when I was writing the most I was doing, gee, it most have been close to 10 or 12 a month.

DAN: *Having plotted it, and then doing the dialogue after it was drawn?*

STAN: Right. When I say 'writing,' I didn't include plotting. I would do the plotting very quickly in about an hour, then I would give the plot to the artist. So to me the writing came in when the artist would give me back the artwork and I'd put the copy in.

But I did much more than that, really. I also served as editor and art director. While I was putting the copy in, I'd be making notes on changes that the artist should make in the artwork. And I would very often deviate from my own original plot because as I looked at the artwork and as I saw how the story was going, I'd often get ideas that I hadn't had when I wrote the plot. So like as not, the stories would turn out to be quite a bit different than I had originally planned them.

And then of course, the artists would always add their own things above and beyond what I had told them in the plot. Jack Kirby, for example. He would change my original plot so much half the time I couldn't recognize it. Which was fine with me, it made it more interesting. It was always like doing a crossword puzzle when I was doing these things.

DAN: *What about the comic strip now, SPIDER-MAN. Do you find that a restrictive format to work in?*

STAN: Oh, terribly. It's much, much more difficult than doing a comic book. You've really got three panels a day...

DAN: *No splash pages.*

STAN: That's right, and in those three panels you cannot have much dialogue because the strips are printed so small in so many papers. You need the first panel to sort of remind the reader of what had happened. The first panel is generally a summing-up panel. The second panel moves your story forward slightly. And the third panel, if you're lucky enough to dream one up, is a cliffhanger. So you can't move the story too quickly, and yet you can't let it just lie there or it gets too dull.

DAN: *I always sort of wanted to see more of that high drama you occasionally did in the comics stories, Aunt May dying, etc. The Master Planner plot, I always thought, was great.*

STAN: I guess I should try to do that. I don't know why I'm a little more inhibited in the newspaper strip.

RED SONJA™

QUARTERLY FROM MARVEL

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"I'm more inhibited in the newspaper strip."

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE CITY? MANY DECENT CITIZENS ARE UNDERGOING PERSONALITY CHANGES, AND SOME ARE TURNING TO CRIME!
THINGS MUST REALLY BE BAD IF CAPTAIN HARRIS ASKED ME TO HELP!
STAN LEE & FRED KIDA 5-23
HERE'S AUNT MAY'S BLOCK! I WONDER IF--OH NO!! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!
IT'S MAY! SHE--SHE'S ROBBING MAILBOXES!

"The first panel is a summing-up. The second moves your story forward slightly. The third is a cliffhanger."

DAN: *It seems, too, that there's a conscious effort to keep Peter Parker in mufti, in street clothes, for a greater amount of the strip than in the comic-book version.*

STAN: You know why? One of the things that I've learned, Dan, is that in the comic books as you'll remember, about half of the story — either in the front or the back or scattered around, depending on how we paginated it — would be just talk and story development. And the other half would usually be the big fight.

In the newspaper, it doesn't work out well. The first installment I had was Dr. Doom vs. Spider-Man, and I tried to put in a big fight scene which stretched over days and days. But somehow in a paper, when you see three panels of fight and then you pick up the paper the next day and you see three panels of fight, it seems childish. The formula for the SPIDEY strip should be to treat it almost like a soap opera, almost as if it's MARY WORTH or something. But it happens that the main character is a costumed superhero rather than an old lady.

Basically it's the adventures of a person who wears a costume and has superpowers in the real world, fighting some sort of evil that's he's trying to overcome. It must be made as realistic as possible, because in the newspaper you don't have as many young readers and I don't want to alienate the old readers who feel this is just a strip for kids. So you have to walk, I think, a very thin line.

DAN: *Did you see BREATHLESS?*

STAN: With the Silver Surfer? I didn't see it, but I've heard a lot about it. I never got a chance to go.

DAN: *Did you have any feeling about it?*

STAN: Well, I was sorry that from what I've heard, the hero of BREATHLESS was a guy who's not the most admirable of men.

DAN: *A very nihilistic character.*

STAN: I would have been happier had he been an admirable guy, and Silver Surfer was his idol and gave him his philosophy. But I was still happy that a reasonably major motion picture would make a big thing of the Silver Surfer.

DAN: *Following your lead, comic book writers and artists changed from being faceless people to being very marketable. Was that a conscious move on your part, or was that something that just happened from the old Marvel Age of Comics?*

STAN: Both. It was conscious on my part, but I never thought it would have the effect it did. What happened was, when I started with Marvel I was trying to make it as light-hearted and personal as possible. I always felt that in the past comic books were so incredibly impersonal. You didn't know who wrote them, who drew them, there was no humor. There was no contact between the reader and the person writing or drawing the work.

So I thought credits would be fun, and that's why I gave the characters nicknames and had my Bullpen Page where I had a column and would talk to the readers. I was trying to make the reader feel not just like a reader, but like a friend — as if we're sharing sort of an in-joke.

DAN: *And it worked very well.*

STAN: Luckily, it did. I've lectured a lot at advertising agencies over the past years, and one of things I used to say is that basically I guess I treated the whole thing like a big advertising campaign.

I wanted to give the product —

"The formula for the SPIDEY strip should be to treat it almost like soap opera."

CONFRONTATION IS NEVER EASY, ESPECIALLY WITH ONE YOU LOVE...
AUNT MAY!
WHAT'S WRONG, PETER? YOU'VE NEVER VISITED ME SO EARLY IN THE MORNING BEFORE!
I COULDN'T SLEEP, AUNT MAY! I HAD TO TALK TO YOU!
STAN LEE FRED KIDA 5-28
IT'S ABOUT THOSE LETTERS!
LETTERS? I DON'T UNDERSTAND!
I SAW YOU LAST NIGHT--WHEN YOU STOLE THEM FROM THE MAILBOXES!
?!
IT

"I think the human race has always

which was Marvel Comics, and myself in a way — a certain personality, like when they tried to make Volkswagon likeable by calling it a Bug, where the readers would identify with us and care about us.

I remembered when I was a kid, there used to be a series of books called the Jerry Todd books. They were like the Hardy Boys and the others, but the Jerry Todd books had a lot of humor. And at the end of the book, there'd be a few pages of personal stuff where the author would talk to the readers. He would tell how he happened to write the book, and what he intended to write next, and where he lived. And I felt so close to that series of books.

DAN: *And that came back to you. And if you hadn't done that, you might, I suppose, be in the same position now that Jerry Siegel is.*

STAN: Very likely.

DAN: *Was there ever a point where Marvel or Cadence or whoever it was realized, "Hey, this guy could go someplace else! This guy is a star!"? Did that ever bother them?*

STAN: Well, if they ever thought that, they didn't tell me. But I was always under contract. Usually, I worked on five-year contracts. Actually, I'm sort of like Old Faithful. I'm the typical company man. It never even occurred to me to go elsewhere.

But we have lost many artists and writers who became stars, and the competition did too. It was almost like musical chairs. Our people would go over to the competition and their people would come over to us, and then we'd switch again. But hell, I've been at the same place for over 40 years. I'm not looking to change. They may get sick of me someday, but I'm happy. They're a nice bunch of guys to work with.

(After a short break for an urgent call, we rejoin Stan, who has moved to the patio of the Marvel Productions offices.)

DAN: *Outdoors on the patio, eh? Sounds like a nice California lifestyle. You're not doing a Woody Allen and regretting leaving New York?*

STAN: I love New York. I lived there all my life and I would never say anything against it. But I really don't miss it. This is so different and so great out here.

This building is a small building with an atrium in the center. It's a one-story building, and all the offices sort of open up onto the atrium. It's like living in a garden. Of course, everybody thinks I'm crazy. I'm the only guy that sits outside in the sun and works.

DAN: *What about the TV adaptations? What about THE INCREDIBLE HULK, what did you think?*

STAN: The Hulk was the best. They changed our original Hulk quite a bit of course, but I thought they did it intelligently. The changes were good, because it sort of had to be done the way it was done for an adult audience. And the performances were good, and I was very pleased with it. I can't say the same for most of the other adaptations, except perhaps DR. STRANGE.

DAN: *I was just going to say the same thing.*

STAN: DR. STRANGE was another intelligent, well-produced show. Unfortunately, it aired at the same time as ROOTS. It might have done much better had it come out at a time when people were prepared to look at it.

But the two that I really hated, I must say, were CAPTAIN AMERICA and the SPIDER-MAN series. They were just the pits.

DAN: *My feelings exactly. What did they do wrong?*

STAN: With SPIDER-MAN, they didn't capture any of the feeling of Spider-Man. They just took some guy in a mask and had him chasing crooks, and it looked silly, it looked juvenile, comic-booky. I thought the directing was bad. Nick Hammond, who played Spider-Man, I feel is a fine actor. But I think he was directed all wrong. He came across as a wimp, much more so than Spider-Man is supposed to. There was no genuine characterization. You didn't know who he was and you didn't care. He was just a kid with a camera on his shoulder.

DAN: *J. Jonah Jameson was just a sort of walk-on nobody...*

STAN: That's right. They didn't treat it like a real movie.

You know, it's a funny thing, years ago I had met a fellow named Peter Guber who's a producer now with Jon Peters. When Peter Guber was head of production at Columbia — this was maybe 10 years ago — he was interested in doing a SPIDER-MAN movie. And he he agreed with me 100 percent. Our thinking was, to do a movie like SPIDER-MAN, you don't get a comic-book-type writer. You get the kind of writer who would have written ON THE WATERFRONT, or KRAMER VS. KRAMER. Because the action is easy. You can always get the fight scenes. But the thing with any superhero character is to make him believable, to make him three-dimensional. And it is harder to make a costumed character believable than a real person, so you've got to write it in an incredibly realistic manner.

The problem is, on most of these shows I was listed as consultant. But I was very naive then. I didn't realize that being a consultant means you can consult, but nobody has to pay any attention to you.

I might be shouting, "This is

had to have somebody to look up to."

wrong, that's wrong." Everybody, I'm sure, thought, "Who is this guy from comic books to tell us television people how to do things?" But their television shows were too comic-booky. I was trying to make them more like television.

Another interesting thing about that is the SUPERMAN movie. Remember SUPERMAN number one? That style was the way SPIDER-MAN should have been done, and that style was the way that I like to think that the Spider-Man comic books were done. And the ironic thing about it is, the Superman books were never written with that kind of tongue-in-cheek humor and realism, as far as I'm concerned.

So the movie of Superman was done in Spider-Man/Marvel-style. And what I'm afraid now is, if SPIDER-MAN gets on the screen and it's done the way the way it should be...

DAN: *People will say it's a ripoff of SUPERMAN.*

STAN: Isn't that funny?

DAN: *Yes, you're quite right. And you're right too, about the writers. It was Mario Puzo of course who outlined the original script for SUPERMAN, and said, "Hey, there's a great Greek tragedy here," and managed to pull it off.*

STAN: That's right. Mario Puzo used to work with me years ago. He worked at our company.

DAN: *Is that right? Along with Mickey Spillane and lots of other people.*

STAN: I'll never forget that once Mario, before he sold THE GODFATHER, was looking for some extra dough. I knew he was a good writer, and I pursued him more than he pursued me. But I said, "Why don't you try doing a comic book for us?" I would've loved him to do one. So I gave him an assignment. And he brought it back a few weeks later, undone. And he said, "Stan, forget it. Now that I realize how difficult it is to do, Christ, I could right a novel easier than this." (Laughter) So that was my brief encounter with Mario Puzo.

DAN: *I always thought that Daredevil would work really well on television. What do you think?*

We made a deal with Warner Brothers TV and Sterling Silliphant. Sterling proposed writing a pilot script for DAREDEVIL and went to ABC Network. And they loved the concept and gave us a commitment for two scripts, which is very unusual, instead of one. That's how enthusiastic they were. But then, for some reason, when Sterling actually wrote the first script, apparently it wasn't what they had in mind. Their ardor cooled.

And it looked like there's no way this won't be produced, with a writer like Silliphant, Warner Brothers TV, ABC Network. And I thought we had a wonderful angle. But anyway, we're going to try again because I still think DARE-DEVIL would make the greatest series.

However, we now have about a dozen deals for a dozen of our different properties which are in various states of progress. I can't help but believe that within the next year or two, some of them will be in the theater. But I can't say.

I don't know if you know it, but THE FANTASTIC FOUR looked like it would be a film a year and a half ago. CBS Films bought the rights, they paid for a script and the president of CBS Films seemed to love the idea. It looked like a certain thing. But the president left CBS Films.

So when another producer heard that the FF was now available, he grabbed the rights to it, intending mainly to zero in on the Torch.

We have another producer who's working on THE MIGHTY THOR right now. In fact, I was just talking to him this morning.

DAN: *I always thought that they couldn't possibly do the Hulk on TV, and yet they did.*

STAN: Well, you can really do anything if you think about it long enough. Another project that's in development now is POWER MAN. We felt it was time for a black hero who is not Shaft and who is not a hip, drug-oriented type of guy. We trying to treat it so that the fact that he's black is just incidental, but he's a superhero. There's a lot of interest in that one.

HOWARD THE DUCK, believe it or not, is in the works with someone. Four people have called in the past three months about THE SILVER SURFER, to see if that's available.

DAN: *Maybe BREATHLESS will push that, a little bit.*

STAN: It's very possible that that's the reason for the calls. I have a feeling there are one or two more that I can't think of.

DAN: *Which is your own favorite character of the Marvel stable?*

STAN: You know, I really can't answer. It's like asking a parent who his favorite child is. I love 'em all in different ways. I like the Silver Surfer because so many readers read so much philosophy into it. The older readers really took it very seriously, which really makes you feel good. I love Spider-Man, because people really identify that with me more than any, I guess. I always liked the Fantastic Four, because I liked the interrelationships amongst the four of them. Dr. Strange, I liked, and Thor because I got to write them in

ALONE ON THE ROOF, SPIDEY KNOWS HE'S THE ONE HOPE OF DOUSING THE FIRE BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE....
=UNNHH! CAN'T STOP -- NOW! I'M =UNNHH THEIR -- ONLY CHANCE!

Pencil sketch for THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN comic-strip.

© 1983 MCG

"I guess I treated the whole Marvel

thing like a big advertising campaign."

this sort of Shakespearean phraseology. I liked Iron Man because I liked the idea of taking a guy who nobody's ever made a hero of before — a guy who's a member of the military-industrial complex — and making a hero out of him.

Daredevil, of course, I loved because the idea of a blind superhero always grabbed me and there were so many dramatic things you could do with him.

I guess maybe if somebody says, "Who's your favorite?," Spider-Man comes to mind at first. Because he's really probably the most successful, and as I say the most identified with me.

And I forgot the Hulk. I was always crazy about him, because I was always proud that we were able to make a hero out of a monster.

DAN: *Mentioning Iron Man, what about the fact that poor old Tony Stark is hopeless alcoholic now? How did you feel about that?*

STAN: That's our effort to be realistic, and I'm hoping that they'll get rid of that pretty soon. It wasn't my idea. I think it brings him into the real world, and that touches like that are good. I haven't really read it that closely, because I don't have time to read all the books. If it's written well, it could be a beautiful touch. If it's not written well, it could cause a little unease on the part of the readers.

I'm hoping that the people at Marvel are — and I'm sure they are — skilled enough that they're doing it the right way.

DAN: *I agree. I'd hate to see him go down the drain on that note. In a moral sense, he's always been one of the more admirable characters in the Marvel universe because he's a self-made man.*

STAN: What happens is, writers are always trying to think, "What can I do to shock the reader? What can I do to inject something?"

DAN: *It sometimes strikes me that comics these days may be too esoteric.*

STAN: My own feeling is I think a lot of this stuff is good for the older readers. I think that we are probably losing — or confusing — maybe not losing, but we are confusing — some of the younger ones. Now, there's a great effort to get older readers in comics and whether it's worth it, I don't know.

I just picked up a book to read the other day myself, the new DAZZLER comic, and there were so many references to so many things. I read the whole story, and there were really things I didn't fully understand. But in a way, that

could be good, because it makes the reader he realize he'd better buy every book or...

DAN: *He's going to miss out on the convoluted mythology.*

STAN: You see, I did that also when I was doing them.

DAN: *Except that you started from the word go, and people followed it. And it wasn't that esoteric back then. A philosophical question: what do people get from the image of the superhero, do you think?*

STAN: I think there's a lot of wish fulfillment there. I think it really goes to the heart of all entertainment, and all heroes. In other words, when I was a kid, and I'm sure you, I fantasized about Robin Hood, King Arthur, King Richard, even Charles Lindbergh. You imagine you're going to do great things.

The one thing that I think is unique about the comics is the double identity bit, which probably was started by Superman. I don't know why, but that seems to grab everybody.

To get away from comics for a minute, the thing I enjoyed it the most in was the old story, THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL. You remember, by the Baroness Orczy? The idea of this fellow who seemed to be a fop in England, and yet he's really the guy risking his life and saving nobiemen in France from the guillotine — that to me was romance and adventure of the highest order.

Maybe, no matter how humble you are, you feel there's something great in you if only people would recognize it or you'd get a chance to show it.

It's like Walter Mitty. Everybody feels, "Everybody thinks of me as this average, ordinary accountant. Wouldn't it be great if I were the guy who could lick the weightlifter the next time he bothers my girlfriend?"

DAN: *They sort of underlined in the SUPERMAN movie that the superhero thing has a lot to do with mythology that's always been around. They're touching on simple but universal themes*

STAN: Exactly. And I think there's a built-in need for heroes, whether it's double-identity or not. I think the human race has always had to have somebody to look up to. I think we have it now even with sports figures and movie actors. Anybody who can excel at something that seems glamorous has an instant fan following.

DAN: *On the converse side, are you ever still condescended to by the uninitiated?*

STAN: Not anymore, no. It used to be that way, 30 years ago. I know when my wife and I would go to a party, people would say, "What do you do?" I tried to avoid saying I wrote comics. I'd say, "I'm a writer." But they didn't let it go at that. "What do you write?" "Well, stories for young people." "What kind of stories?" Eventually they'd pin me down. And when I'd say, "Comic books," they'd walk away.

Now, it's totally different. Today if anybody finds out I'm connected with Marvel Comics, they all walk away from Robert Redford and come running over to where I'm standing.

(Laughter.)

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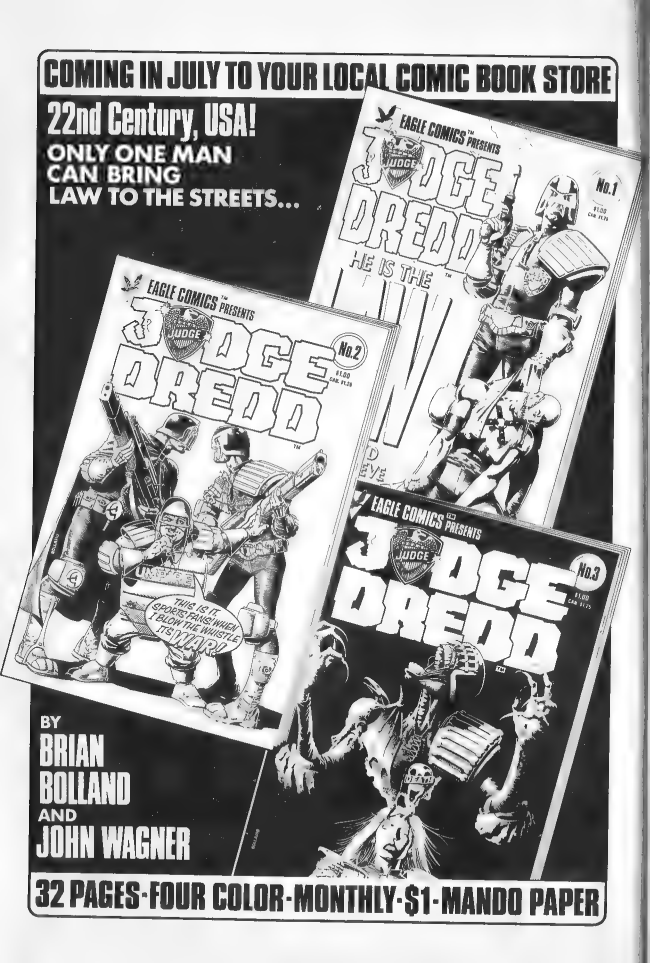

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BOLLAND
AND
JOHN WAGNER

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

A RARE WINE

Dear David:

I have just finished COMICS INTERVIEW #3and once again I was pleased!

The interview with **P. Craig Russell** was my least favorite among all of the interviews. He and his art are just a little too "offbeat" for my own personal tastes. This doesn't mean that he is a crummy artist or anything, it just simply means that some people love a rare wine and others don't.

I do agree with **Kurt Busiek** that other craftsmen that don't get all of the convention-fan whoopla should be interviewed within your pages. **Schaffenberger, Swan, Mooney, Tuska,** and **Heck** are all very good choices! If you are going to interview the "big" names I hope that you keep up your present way of hitting them with issues and questions that the other magazines haven't worn out. A good example was the way you did the **Marv Wolfman** interview.

Although I did find the fan interview with **D. Jon Zimmerman** very enlightening, I do wish that you would interview what I guess you would call a "regular convention-going letter-writing fan." The kind you would find in any comic shop or drug store across the country. I myself would find this very interesting.

I was very pleased with your interview with **Dick Goldwater.** It made a nice contrast to that of **P. Craig Russell's** interview. I think that more attention should be paid to the lesser-published creators of the comic-book business.

Keep it up, you've got a full-time reader in ol' Beau!

Stephen Scott Beau Smith
110 Lewis Ave-Apt #7
Barboursville, WV 25504

NIXON WAS NOT A CROOK

Dear Dave,

Responding to **Arthur Greenwald's** letter:

The censor at ABC who "deleted" the entire arsenal of the East German army has a background in developmental psychology and worked in an advisory capacity with Action for Children's Television before joining the network. I have been told that the person was hired specifically to appease that pressure group.

No villain ever proclaims himself to be evil. **Hitler** was Germany's salvation; **Nixon** was not a crook; **Peggy Charren** and ACT do not favor censorship.

Baloney. Watch what they *do*, not what they *say*.

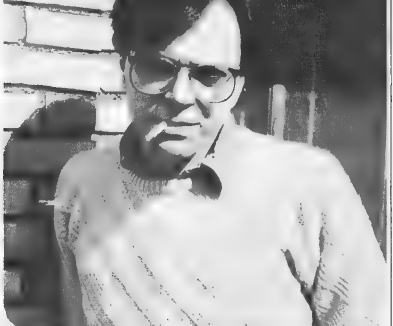
ACT has accomplished only one thing: the intrusion of psychology into the creative area for the sole purpose of reshaping children's television into a subtle form of propaganda. Specifically, they are trying to teach that there is no such thing as evil, that people always mean exactly what they say, that the expression of strong emotion is tantamount to physical violence, and that no individual can accomplish anything without the aid of a group.

All of these notions which, if widely held, would serve a demagogue in good stead

As far as I'm concerned, one can support groups like ACT only if one believes that writers and artists need a Big Brother peering over their shoulders to prevent the dissemination of ideas which are psychologically "incorrect."

Steve Gerber
Burbank, CA

Photo: Ron Fontes



Howard Chaykin

HATES CHAYKIN

Dear COMICS INTERVIEW:

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Sean Carr
Residence: Minneapolis, MN
Born: Hills of Pennsylvania, 1967
Occupation: Serious teenager
Training: Years of hard labor in public schools and at my drawing table
Loves: Movies, Writing, Drawing, Television, etc.
Hates: Most Howard Chaykins

Sean Carr
1569 E River Terrace
Mpls, MN 55414

PS: This is in response to the Vital Statistics of **Howard Chaykin** on p. 37 in the third issue of COMICS INTERVIEW. Who does he think his readers are — senile 90-year-olds?

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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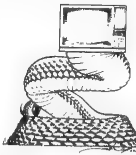

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STAN LEE vs THE SHE-HULK

Dear DAK,

In just a short time, COMICS INTERVIEW has become, in my estimation, the best fanzine on the market. Each issue continues to be entertaining and informative.

Incidentally, remember when I used to campaign so hard to get the She-Hulk comic cancelled? (And incidentally, Dave, that was nothing against you, so don't take it personally.) Well, eventually I succeeded in that goal, and now I'm working just as hard to get the She-Hulk out of THE AVENGERS.

In fact, getting her out of THE AVENGERS alone isn't good enough. I won't rest until She-Hulk is gone for good; until she's been destroyed. I want very trace of her wiped out of existence. I'll never rest until this goal is accomplished. In fact, it's always been something of a dream of mine to see Marvel publish a special novel entitled THE DEATH OF THE SHE-HULK, in which everyone at Marvel gets to take a shot at doing away with this repulsive character. I know **Jim Starlin,** for one, would love to do a few pages.

Frankly, I don't see how any True Believer could claim to actually like the She-Hulk. How about initiating a new column in COMICS INTERVIEW called "She-Hulk Haters of America," in which each issue you interview someone who hates She-Hulk? I'm sure all true Marvel fans would come beating down your door in an attempt to be first on line to tell why they hate She-Hulk.

Finally, I have only one suggestion for the subject of a future interview: **Stan Lee! Stan Lee! Stan Lee!!!** By the way, DAK, you don't have to worry — I promise to *never* start up a "Committee to Cancel COMICS INTERVIEW!

Barry Dutter
2283 Old Farm Rd
Scotch Plains, NJ 07076

By now you know that your wishes have been granted in this very issue, Barry, in the form of — not one, but — two candid talks with Stan the Man. He has been among the most requested interview subjects since the start of this magazine, and that's why we've gone out of our way to bring you the very latest in his Hollywood happenings, by including a special under-the-wire update received as we went to press. Like you, Barry, we're Stan Lee fans from way back (but remember, he's also the one who created the She-Hulk, the character you just love to hate)!

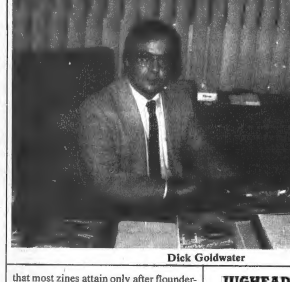
—DAK

BATTING 1.000

Dear Dave:

Just picked up your third issue and must say you're batting 1.000. Not bad at all!

I'm very impressed. The consistency COMICS INTERVIEW has is something



Dick Goldwater

that most zines attain only after floundering around with a style-a-month for years. INTERVIEW has a highly professional quality whole avoiding the stuffiness of a slick professional magazine.

I've found every interview fascinating for different reasons: **Marv Wolfman** for his infectious enthusiasm; **Howie Chaykin** for his humor and self-cheering attitude; **Craig Russell** for his believably honest approach and discovery of **Elvis Costello;** and **Dick Goldwater** for putting comics where he knows them best — as a business.

I read every issue from cover to cover and haven't found anything yet uninteresting. Quality of the photographs is indeed very good — I especially enjoyed page 8. However, **Dick Goldwater's** photograph was printed with Hershey-Bar ink, but I'm sure you've a good excuse for that.

Suggestion time: I too would like to see some of the old hands interviewed—**Don Heck, Jim Aparo, Joe Sinnott,** and **Jullus Schwartz** — now he would be fascinating!

And thanks for the photo of **Terry Austin,** though it saddens me to see I don't look at all like him.Oh, well.

John K. Austin
S. 604 Jefferson #6
Spokane, WA 99204

Thanks for your letter, John — you've given me an excuse to mention two items about issue #3 both regarding photos. First, the Terry Austin picture you liked so much was taken by Eliot Brown, who also took the much-acclaimed Frank Miller picture in #2, among others. Second, the Dick Goldwater photo and film vanished as we went to press, and we had to make a last-minute enlargement from the proof sheet. My apologies to both Dick Goldwater and photographer Jim Salicrup. A better version of the picture appears here just for the record. And I'm glad you've noticed our policy of bringing you top-quality photos whenever possible!

—DAK

JUGHEAD GOES PUNK

Dear DAK:

I happen to have a copy of that issue where Jughead "daringly" goes punk, and it was the funniest Archie comic I'd read in years — but for all the wrong reasons. Writer **George Gladir** apparently understands "punks" and new music the same way the producers of REEFER MADNESS understood pot. If you haven't read it yet, you ought to. It's a scream.

Jim Massara
290 Fowler Drive
Athens, GA 30601

FRANK MILLER'S GOLD KEY COMICS

DAK:

Could you please, if you know, tell me the specific issues of Gold Key horror comics that **Frank Miller** drew?

Dale Sutton
908 Just-a-Merc
Lansing, Michigan 48910

The best I can do, Dale, is pass your question on to the readers. Maybe, if Don Rosa is reading this, he'll be able to tell you, Dale.

—DAK

MONEY'S WORTH

Dear David,

During my twenty-odd year relationship with comics, I have not been one to write LOCs; however, I did want to let y'all know that I am thoroughly enjoying COMICS INTERVIEW. Its diverse scope certainly does cover the spectrum of comics and related material, making your magazine a very interesting package.

I must admit that my initial expectations were that I would enjoy only about 60% of the material presented, but I sure was wrong — I enjoy damn near everything. And it sure is nice to have no doubt that I have gotten my money's worth by purchasing COMICS INTERVIEW.

For example, it was nice to see recent interviews with **Steve Gerber** and **Howard Chaykin. Mark Evanier's** experiences were interesting, informative and fascinating. The **George Roussos** interview had me absorbed by the information presented. **Jim Galton, Steve Oliff, Will Meugniot, Jim Novak, Terry Austin . . .** the list of good enjoyable material goes on and on.

You probably have a fair amount of material on the burners, but I have a couple of specific interests I would like to share with you. I am hopeful of seeing future interviews with some of the fans who started out in the Golden Age, did LOCs in the Silver (along with other fandom stuff), but are not as active now. **Dr. Jerry Bails** (ALTER-EGO) comes to mind, as well as **Ronn Foss,** who recently had a LOC published in ALL-STAR SQUADRON.

Then there are the fans who started out in the Silver Age, looked back on the Golden Age and are still active now. It would be interesting to see their perceptions of the medium in individual interviews. Or perhaps a panel interview might be in order. How's that for an idea?

One last item of information concerning the **Chaykin/Abel Murder Mystery.** A new headline has surfaced, stating "Abel Sought, Chaykin Exhumed." It is located in AVENGERS #232, page 20, panel 5, and the art credit for that issue is **Joe Sinnott** and crew. Who the particular perpetrator is remains to be seen.

Thanks again for supplying me with one of my monthly comics highlights and wishing COMICS INTERVIEW continued success.

Randy Linder
3912 Dover Place
St. Louis, MO 63116

FF PLOT FOR SALE?

Dear Mr. Kraft:

I really enjoy COMICS INTERVIEW. Interviewing colorists and letterers is an excellent idea, as they hardly get any publicity from the other fanzines.

And, David, you wouldn't be willing to sell or give away any extra Xerox copies of the plot to FANTASTIC FOUR #1, would you? If you are, let me be the first to know.

Good luck going monthly!

Bill Cairns
21 Miller Place
Levittown, NY 11756

Thanks, Bill — we'll need it. As for Stan's FANTASTIC FOUR plot, part of it is printed right here in this very issue, for the first time anywhere. Consider it yet another inside-the-industry scoop, the kind only COMICS INTERVIEW can bring you!

—DAK

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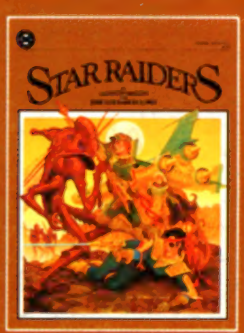

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